

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE THEOLOGY

AND PRAXIS OF THE SACC, 1968-1988

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all those South Africans who were prepared, during this period of 1968-1988, to risk and even sacrifice their lives in their resistance to apartheid. For, by their actions they intensified and deepened the contradictions within the Church compelling it to move from an alienating praxis to the praxis of liberation.

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The completion of this study is a miracle itself, given the extent of my involvement in national issues related to the struggle for a just society in South Africa. I undertook this seemingly impossible task to inform myself about the past struggles within the SACC and its constituent members to enable me to intelligently assist the SACC family to critically determine their mission during the most difficult time in the life of the people of South Africa.

As many would know, I came to the SACC, in a sense, as an "outsider" and thus I was not part of this history of the SACC. The 1987 National Conference, where I was inducted as the General Secretary of the SACC was the first National Conference I had ever attended. Thus, it was imperative for me to study this crucial period of the life of the SACC to inform my practice within the Church in South Africa. This, as one would imagine was a very useful and educative exercise for me.

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ABBREVIATIONS / ACRONYMS

1. ANC	African National Congress of South Africa
2. AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
3. BCP	Black Community Programmes
4. BCMA	Black Consciousness Movement of Azania
5. CCD	Christian Citizenship Department of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa
6. CCSA	The Christian Council of South Africa
7. CI	Christian Institute of Southern Africa
8. CPSA	The Church of the Province of Southern Africa.
9. COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
10. DC	Division of the Dependants Conference of the SACC
11. DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
12. FEDSEM	The Federal Seminary of Southern Africa
13. ICA	Division of the Inter Church Aid of the SACC
14. MCSA	Methodist Church of Southern Africa
15. NACTU	National Congress of Trade Unions
16. NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
17. NEF	National Emergency Fund
18. JHB	Johannesburg
19. J&R	Justice and Reconciliation Division of the SACC
20. PAC	Pan Africanist Congress of Azania
21. PCSA	Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa
22. PSC	Programme for Social Change, Spro-cas II
23. PCR	Programme to Combat Racism
24. SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
25. SABC-TV	South African Broadcasting Corporation Television
26. SACC	South African Council of Churches
27. SADF	South African Defence Force
28. SAFOR	South African Fellowship of Reconciliation
29. SAO	South African Outlook
30. SASM	South African Students Movement
31. SASO	South African Students Organisation
32. SPROCAS II	Special Project for Christian Action in Society
33. SPROCAS I	Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society
34. UDF	United Democratic Front
35. WCP	White Community Programmes, Spro-cas II
36. WCC	World Council of Churches

ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to sketch the foundation for a critical theological theory on the practice of the Church in South Africa in relation to mission in crisis situations with specific reference to the SACC. This is done by looking at the practice of the SACC and its constituent members between 1968-1988 when the major struggle to move from resolutions and statements of condemnation of the apartheid system to practical action to eliminate this system was waged.

The Marxian concept of ideology is employed here to uncover the extent to which an ideology held by Church Leaders during the period under study influenced and pervaded the public practice of the SACC.

During the period 1968-1988 the church in South Africa could only act, within the framework of the existing material conditions, in which it found itself. Within that framework it had scope to act and to contribute towards changing the conditions in accordance with the mission of the Church, i.e. in accordance with its task to contribute towards justice for all people. However its potential to contribute towards change was not used adequately during the first part of the period.

The reason why the church failed to use the scope for action was the fact that it was influenced by the dominant perceptions of the social reality and by categories used by the dominant groups for interpreting that reality, rather than by the absolute norm of the Gospel. This trend prevailed until approximately the year 1974. During this period prior to 1968 the ideological captivity of the Church manifested itself mainly in the limitation of its concerns to the freedom of worship rather than religious practice and in the condemnation of evil rather than in efforts to remove that evil.

It was only in the period 1968 to 1988 that a phenomenal struggle took place within the Church of South Africa about the mission of the Church and it progressed from liberal opposition to radical resistance against what was evil in South African society. The culmination of this is signified by the historic Convocation of Churches held in May 1988.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to sketch the foundation for a critical theological theory that will enable a better understanding of the practice of the Church in relation to mission in crises situations. The specific aim here is to uncover the extent to which ideology in the Marxian sense of negative ideology, pervades the public practice of the Church. After uncovering this paralysing reality for the Church I will attempt to establish a way of overcoming this reality by using a critical theological theory via transformational praxis.

Hypotheses

My general hypotheses therefore is that the ideological character of false theory, in this case false theology, conceals the real material interests of those propagating it. The basis of this hypotheses is the classical Marxian declaration that theory cut from the practical task of transforming the world is false and an abstraction. Marx, in the second of his thesis on Feuerbach asserts that "the question whether objective

truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question"(1). Once truth is isolated from practice then it becomes a purely scholastic question. It reduces practice, in an idealistic way, to intellectual activity.

For Marx, criticism must be situated in the historical process as praxis, i.e. it should not only illuminate the distortion of reality, but it should transform the conditions which allow such distortion.(2)

To the extent therefore that false theory succeeds in legitimating domination and conceals the real relations between groups in society, it becomes false consciousness.

On this basis, my hypotheses for the Church is that the theological theory of the Church and its (dominating) social practice conceals contradictory practices in the Church and in society, making religion (the Christian faith in this case) profoundly false, generating and reproducing conditions of alienation and domination.

Socially, the Church is a religious phenomenon but like all religious phenomena, it is not an autonomous social reality.(3) As much as it is affected by variables such as tradition, education, historical location, etc. it is

also affected by the concrete economic base which in turn affects social structure in society. As Per Frostin has said "the spiritual cannot be scientifically dealt with if it is isolated from its material base".(4)

In the same spirit James Cochrane says that the theory of the Church abstracted from actual life of the Church, is mere dogmatic assertion, a perpetuation of an illusion. Such a theory, he says, is a false theory leading to an idealistic ecclesiology which cannot cope with the "is" (actuality) of the Church in relation to the "ought" (potentiality) of the Church.(5) A critical theological theory of the Church must take the Church seriously as a human and a historical entity. Thus Davis notes that "a scientific critique of religion must therefore always rest upon a detailed study of the actual, concrete material conditions of life at every pastoral time and phase".(6)

To test this hypotheses I intend to explore the following thesis: *That in its struggle to move from a just condemnation of evil, to action to remove such evil, the post-1968 Church's ideological basis reveals that the practice of the Church was influenced by the dominant perceptions of the social reality of South Africa rather than some absolute norm of the Gospel.*

To establish this central hypotheses a number of sub-problems around this hypotheses need to be addressed which may be presented in the form of a series of theses, or a set of statements to be defended.

The first thesis is that the practice of the Church before 1968 was concerned more with the preservation of the freedom of worship and religious practice rather than change of society. The second thesis, which is related to the first, is that in its attempt to address the evils of our racist and apartheid South African society, the Church was preoccupied with the mission of condemnation of evil rather than the mission to remove the said evil.

My third thesis which forms part of the central hypothesis, is that the social practice of the post-1968 Church shows the Church to be trapped within the dominant ideology of the dominant classes in society whilst struggling to present itself as guided by some absolute norm of the Gospel.

Once these central themes are established I shall deal with the consequences of the exposure of the Church's relation to the material interest of the dominant classes and the related contradictions by establishing the following:

1. That the exposure of the ideological base of the Church forced it to take an option for the poor or to take sides with the cause of justice and righteousness as opposed to the injustices and evils of the apartheid system in South Africa. The exposure was due to the deepening political crisis in the country and the resultant conflict.
2. That this thesis led to a critical review of the concept of mission resulting in the development of the theology of liberation.

Framework and Methodology of the Study

The focus of this study will be on the current theological theory and church practice in important South African models of mission as expressed mainly through the life and practice of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the overall tradition embodied within the member churches of the SACC. My study therefore, will be dealing with those churches which are known to have rejected and condemned apartheid as a sin, and the theological justification thereof as heresy. These are churches which in the main depend upon the liberal philosophical tradition, a characteristic feature of the so-called English speaking churches (although not all member churches of the SACC use English predominantly or belong to the English tradition).(7)

The study will cover the period of two decades between 1968-1988, starting from the publication of the "Message to the People of South Africa" up to the Convocation of Churches in May 1988 where the SACC family of Churches formally adopted the method of effective non-violent action to end the apartheid system.

I have chosen this period for two reasons. The first is that this period, unlike the time prior to 1968, is one during which the struggle to translate theory into practice was intensively waged. Second, this is a period when the Church moved beyond mere protest against apartheid's attack on the freedom of religion and conscience to an active engagement in programmes aimed at ending the apartheid system.

Focus

To investigate the practice of the Church in South Africa in order to uncover the extent to which ideology pervaded its public practice I shall situate my criticism of the Church during this period on the concrete historical life of the Church at the level of praxis. As indicated, I take seriously the fact that a scientific critique of religion must rest upon a detailed study of actual, concrete material conditions of life at every particular time and

place. In this view, religion as consciousness is not independent of material conditions. Yet, neither is it simply a passive reflection of external reality. Thus the focus is on the actual concrete historical reality of the Church, in a complex interaction between its own particularity as an institution and the material conditions of its time, as these develop and change.

The aim is not just to illuminate the degree of distortion of reality or its contradictions, but also to develop a theoretical basis for the transformation of these conditions which allow such distortions within the Church of Christ.

Analytical Approach

My theoretical framework will be Marx's negative concept of ideology, an effective theoretical tool of analysis to unpack the hidden ideological presuppositions and assumptions of the Church in its practice in South Africa. I use this negative Marxian concept of ideology being aware of other and later Marxian views on ideology, which move beyond this limited conception of negative ideology to a generalized concept of ideology.(8)

Although I take this development seriously for the purposes of this study I focus primarily on the critical

concept of ideology as developed by Marx. I agree with Cochrane that Marx's negative concept of ideology is "sufficiently discriminating and analytically potent to warrant its separation from a general sociology of knowledge". (9) In arguing this point Cochrane continues:

Moreover, its connection to praxis, the overcoming of the conditions of the distortion of knowledge, and to a critique of the interests of a dominant class, enables the Marxian concept of ideology to have a penetrative capability in the analysis of social change and structure which any general or perspectivist theory lacks. (10)

I can thus say, like Cochrane, that "the social scientific value of retaining the critical, negative use of the concept of ideology in the sense described above, is thus regarded as sufficiently high to make it the basis of the present study". (11) One must be conscious, though, that this is a restricted use of the concept of ideology.

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6. Davis, C. Theology and Political Society (London: SCM Press 1980),p. 125ff.
7. See Cochrane, J. op.cit.,Villa Vicencio, C Trapped in Apartheid: A Socio-Theological History of the English Speaking Churches: (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1988) and De Gruchy, J. The Church Struggle in South Africa. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1979). They are helpful in dealing with this definition of English Speaking Churches.

8. A study of the development of Marxist conception of ideology from Marx through Engels, Lenin, and Luckacs to Gramsci shows that there was a clear change of the meaning of ideology towards a matured form of Marx's positive concept of ideology. With Gramsci the positive concept of ideology yields its most creative fruits. Gramsci disposed of the negative concept of ideology and expounded on the positive concept to include the basic elements of the former. He achieved this by introducing the notion of hegemony, that is, the ability of a class to secure the adhesion and consent of the broad masses. He argues for instance, that "bourgeois rule could not be sustained by force alone and that in order for the bourgeoisie to organise the whole of society in its own interests it had to develop a coherent Weltanschauung to which men and women freely submitted". See Lorrain, J. Marxism and Ideology (London: Macmillan Press, 1983), p.80. See also Luckacs, G. History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 65, 257.

9. Cochrane, J. op.cit., p.207

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

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PART ONE

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

As I am going to use Marx's negative concept of ideology as my theoretical framework and as an effective tool of analysis of the practice of the Church in South Africa for the period already stated it is necessary to elaborate on this concept of ideology.

1.1 MARX'S NEGATIVE CONCEPT OF IDEOLOGY

For Marx, ideology in the negative sense has to do with those ideas which express practice inadequately. Ideology for him is illusory, a distorted form of consciousness or knowledge. It has three specific and connected features:

- i) It conceals social contradictions, inverts reality or falsifies it.

- ii) It does this in the interests of the dominant class and,
- iii) It presents itself as non-ideological (consciously or unconsciously), that is, as the natural order of things.

Here the ideas of the dominant class take the form of generally valid laws and perspectives, and thus pretend or claim to be universal. For the ruling class to carry through its aims it is compelled to represent its interests as the common interest for all members of society.

In the South African society, for instance, the ruling white racist minority presents itself as representing the interests of all South Africans, including the interests of security, economic-development, and the preservation of the identities of all cultural, tribal and minority groups. It gives its ideas the form of universality, and represents them as the only rational and universally valid ones.(1)

On the other hand the production of ideas of the dominated classes are controlled by and subject to the interests of the ruling class. Thus the

dominated classes produce ideas which express the dominant material relationship even though counter positions may emerge.(2) The character of ideology, therefore, is given by its relation to the interests of the ruling class and not by a genetic relation to the class from which it originates. For this reason and in this sense ideology, necessarily serves the interest of the ruling dominant class.

First, as we have said before, ideology in the Marxian sense concerns a distorted picture of contradictions in society. How does it do that? It does so by either ignoring them or by misrepresenting them. Like the German idealist philosophers, the approach here is to try to deal with conflict without addressing the existence of real contradictions which form the basis of these conflicts, or by deliberately or consciously distorting the reality of these contradictions. All of this serves the interests of the dominant or ruling class. An attempt is then made to reconstitute in consciousness a world of unity and cohesion without taking seriously the contradictions inherent in it. On this basis Marx conceptualizes the function of ideology as the reproduction of

contradictory social relations. (3)

Similarly, Lorrain identifies four different forms, or ways, in which the ideological concealment of contradictions is achieved: (i) denial of contradictions; (ii) misunderstanding of contradictions; (iii) displacement of contradictions (iv) dilution of contradictions.(4)

Ideology for Marx therefore is a particular form of consciousness which promotes a distorted picture of reality. It simultaneously strives to reconstitute in consciousness a world of unity and cohesion.

I need to make it clear here that I shall not engage in a debate of Marx's critique of religion, nor shall I debate Marx's negative concept of ideology. These debates are undertaken in other studies such as those of Gramsci, Davis (5) and Hinkelammert (6), to mention a few, although one would argue that all of these studies have not yet resolved all the problems involved. I leave this area for further studies and research which I consider to be crucial, but which are beyond the scope of this work even as I retain the concept of ideology in its limited form here.

1.2 THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL REALITY

From the above analysis of Marx's concept of ideology it is clear that the question of "perceptions of social reality" is of vital importance as it is the arena of distortion of reality. As a result this notion will be central to our study.

I wish to show in this study that the practice of the Church in South Africa, in relation to its mission in a situation of crisis, is negatively influenced by the dominant perceptions of the reality of our society; perceptions which enter the Church through those of, or allied to, the dominant elites who are involved in the history, practice and life of the Church. This is what shapes many decisions and practices, rather than some absolute norm of the Gospel, the Christian tradition or theology. I will show, in fact, that these perceptions of the reality of our society influence the understanding of what it is that is taken to be "normative", or what we call the "Gospel", "Christian tradition" or "theology", thus relativizing the basis of faith and our practice as Christians.

1.3 ON PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL REALITY

Although many other authors have dealt with the problem of the perception of reality, from different angles and perspectives, I have relied heavily on Franz J Hinkelammert (7) and Otto Maduro (8) in dealing with this subject. Their approach is comprehensive as well as compatible with the negative concept of ideology which I employ.

Hinkelammert says that our perceptions of social reality are predetermined by the theoretical categories of the framework we use for interpreting that reality. Thus:

social reality is not pure and simple, but rather a reality perceived from a given viewpoint. We can perceive only the reality that becomes apparent to us with the theoretical categories we use. It is within this framework that phenomena come to have some meaning.(9)

The theoretical categorical framework one uses to interpret reality allows one to perceive some phenomena which may not be perceived thus by others, depending on the framework they use. It allows one to conceive of certain goals of human activity and not others. In fact, the categorical framework one uses often makes a given perspective on reality appear the only possible and humanly (theologically, religiously) acceptable one. So

also religious images and mysteries, theological and biblical interpretations of Christians, can be and often are predetermined by such a theoretical categorical framework.

People normally act upon reality only within and on the basis of the theoretical framework they use. Normally they work within these predetermined theoretical categorical frameworks without wholly being conscious of them. Thus they think that they arrive at their conclusions or decisions by pure and objective perception of social phenomena or social reality, which perceptions are therefore taken to be "the natural order" of things. They are not only unconscious of their theoretical framework, or of the historically conditioned nature of the supposed "natural order" of things, but also of the concealment of reality in ideological practices. So Hinkelammert notes that "the manipulation of collective awareness and its ideological indoctrination aim precisely at hiding as far as possible the categories with which society is interpreted".(10)

This "collective awareness" and its ideological indoctrination always pretend that what is at work are overt, standard, and universally accepted categories of

interpreting reality. But the more unconscious one is of one's categorical framework the more hypocritical contradictory may be the stances one assumes towards social reality.

Otto Maduro addresses the problem of perceptions of social reality from the perspective of a sociology of religion. He says that "no religion exists in vacuum. Every religion, any religion,... is a situated reality - situated in a specific human context, a concrete and determined geographical space, historical moment, and social milieu". (11)

This location of religion within society has serious implications. First, it means that religion is influenced and affected by the concrete historical reality within which it operates. Second, to this extent religion becomes a product of society which serves that particular society in a particular way.(12) Third, it means that as society develops and changes through history, so too does religion.

Society, especially a modern capitalist society, is made of different groups of people of different social classes, of different degrees of power, in a particular

relation of domination and thus of objectively opposing interests. Each group has particular needs, interests, expectations, thoughts and categories which differ from those of others, sometimes substantially. As a result the objective situation of any individual or group in a determinant position within a class structure disposes them to perceive reality in a manner corresponding to their social condition and significantly opposed to that of other class positions within the same society.(13)

The place people occupy in the social system orients and compels them to think and act in a certain manner in the area of religion too - perhaps without them realising it, perhaps in spite of their intention to do just the opposite.(14)

In a racist society like South Africa, for instance, blacks and whites often perceive reality in radically different ways. Cultural differences, prejudice, imperial-colonial negative stereotypes of other races, and so on, condition to a large extent the framework within which whites generally see the situation in South Africa. Blacks, on the other hand, generally see it from the position of racial oppression and exploitation. Accordingly, the understanding of the "gospel" by South

African Christians depends on their upbringing, associations and position in society in relation to the dynamics of power and domination.

Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen outline this problem most succinctly. They note that "there is a 'hidden' set of perceptions and attitudes which are socially determined, and these affect quite directly perceptions of ministry, of theology, of doctrine, of pastoral practice, and so on". They continue further to say that

one very common manifestation of this is the inability of many white Christians to see at all the point of black Christians who feel the need to involve themselves in the resistance struggle in South Africa. Both interpret and seek to live by the gospel, yet each understands it differently.(15)

They conclude that the explanation for this is found in respective social contexts and location, including the material conditions determining the existence of each one of them.(16)

1.4 CONCLUSION

The following analysis takes Marx's negative concept of ideology as a starting point after identifying a theoretical categorical framework for the conception of the mission of the Church. On that basis I shall interpret the categorical framework used by the member

churches of the SACC in their practices and actions between the years 1968-1988.

The period 1968-1988 is chosen mainly because it is during this period that the question of whether the Church can actively work for the ending of the unjust political system became the most pertinent. Before this period the Church's concern was that of freedom of religion and the evil nature of the system, as stated earlier. With SPROCAS I and II, and the debate about the WCC Programme to Combat Racism, the question of whether or not the Church may actively work for the end of a political system arose intensified by the violence non-violence debate. This was followed by the 1974 Conscientious Objection Resolution of the SACC, later resolutions on economic sanctions against South Africa, and the debate about prayer for the end of unjust rule, all culminating in the Convocation of Churches in 1988 which adopted the method of effective non-violent action to end the system of apartheid.

The method of historical analysis adopted here will look at specific paradigmatic events throughout this period which are regarded as pertinent to this study. I shall analyse these events as "contrast experiences" as described methodologically by Frostin (17). The study will involve the use of documentary evidence, minutes,

resolutions, statements and archival records of the SACC. I will concentrate particularly on the "Message to the People of South Africa", the Special Fund of the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR), the Conscientious Objection Resolution (SACC 1974), SPROCAS I and II, sanctions resolutions, the prayer for the end of unjust rule, the question of legitimacy, the Methodist debate on the Peace Church, and the Standing for the Truth Campaign (effective non-violent action).

I shall proceed to raise specific questions concerning the struggle to translate theory into practice, the concept of mission, the contrast between survival strategies of liberation, the issue of the concept of neutrality, and contradictions in the "violence debate".

The inherent contradictions in the Church's treatment of these issues will enable us to uncover hidden ideological interests in its practice, and enable us to develop a critical theological reflection flowing out of this analysis and situation, specifically, by means of a critical review of the concept of mission.

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PART TWO

AN OVERVIEW OF THE NATURE OF THE PRACTICE OF THE

SACC AND RELATED CHURCHES

1968-1988

CHAPTER TWO

2. AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED HISTORICAL MOMENTS RELATING TO
THE SOCIAL PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH BEFORE 1968

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Although the first church was erected in 1501 in South Africa by Portuguese Catholics in Mossel Bay, the origins of the Church in South Africa is usually traced to 1652 when the Dutch East India Company set up its half-way station at the Cape of Good Hope.

(1) Between this year and 1968 I have chosen to identify and deal with four moments of history which I believe are of importance to establish my thesis concerning this period. These are:

- (1) the role of early missionaries;
- (2) the response of the Church to the period of early industrialisation in South Africa;
- (3) the "Church Clause" of the late 1950's;
- (4) the incorporation of the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre into white Roodepoort and the prohibition of Africans on staying overnight at the centre.

2.2 THE ROLE OF EARLY MISSIONARIES

The hot and long-standing debate over the role of missionaries has raised much battle dust. (2)

Traditional Church historiography has always presented the role of missions and missionaries in a positive light with little critique in most historical works on South African Church history. Cochrane makes a brief survey of some of these works from J H du Plessis' classic history of missions in South Africa to those of G B A Gerdener, L Hewson, P Hinchliff, W E Brown, H Florin, John de Gruchy, and E Regehr.(3) In this brief analysis he shows that in the main some of these consisted of uncritical narratives about the role of missionaries, and at best, showered them with praises.(4) Others refer to imperialist critique of missions, putting missionaries even more on the side of victims of colonial oppression and exploitation, and regarding it as "not suprising" but simply tries to explain it.(5)

Cochrane then identifies Lukas de Vries and Nosipho Majeke as exceptions in this regard. They located their work within the critical historiographical

tradition. De Vries gives a critical account of mission and colonialism whilst Majeke gave a damning critique of the role of missionaries in conquest. On the other hand Edgar Brooks came to the defence of missionaries. He felt that the criticisms of missionaries were doing an injustice to noble men and women who made great personal sacrifices for the sake of the mission of the Church. Cochrane then refers to Monica Wilson as a recent apologist for what is seen as a positive contribution of Missionaries.(6)

Cochrane builds on the tradition of Lukas de Vries and Nosipho Majeke to make a scientific critique of the role of the established churches particularly between the years 1903-1930. He shows that missionaries associated with these churches were in fact naturally children of their times, influenced by the Victorian expansionism of the nineteenth century, and, that there was an intimate connection between the missionary and the Empire. For Cochrane "ideological captivity, rather than the failings or the disingenuity of its workers and leaders characterises the Church and its missions in the nineteenth century".(7)

Missionaries were basically custodians of the religion of the European communities (8) and "served the prevailing ideology of imperial expansionism", as Greg Cuthbertson puts it.(9) Cuthbertson then concludes that "ideological hegemony was the ultimate goal of the religion of the status quo".(10) For Cuthbertson the conduct of missionaries was "profoundly influenced by the powerful prevailing secular forces of capitalist imperialism and militarism which distorted purely religious motives".(11) "In fact", Cuthbertson says, "missionary conquest was seen to be conditional upon the establishment of British hegemony".(12)

Charles Villa-Vicencio, using Cochrane, follows the same critical socio-economic historiographical approach in his Chapter on "Imperialists and Missionaries" in Trapped in Apartheid, and elaborates on this critique of the missionaries. He shows that although missionaries were the "conscience of settlers and administrators alike", this conscience always operated within the accepted structure of colonial domination".(13) They expressed their witness within the framework of their imperial loyalties. Villa-Vicencio shows that even in the cases of concerned missionaries like Johannes van der Kemp, James Read, Robert Moffat, John Phillip and

Livingstone of the London Missionary Society, who are known for their non-conformist heritage and for championing the cause of the indigenous people against racial oppression by the settlers, "there is little evidence to suggest that they were any less enamoured with the virtues of imperialism than some other missionaries".(14)

Villa-Vicencio argues though that it would be wrong to suggest that their entrapment in imperialist designs is an indication that they were not committed to their evangelistic task. On the contrary their political protest was usually motivated by their concern that the racial policies of the colonialists would hamper the evangelical task of their mission. Cuthbertson, in dealing with missionaries and colonial warfare, says that what was at stake in the 1899 - 1902 war which led missionaries to wish for the triumph of British arms in South Africa was "the spread of their own missionary work". British hegemony for them was a "pre-requisite for the smooth and effective expansion of Christianity in the region".(15)

African and Black theologians have criticised missionaries and their role from a theological

perspective. I do not purport to discuss this critique in full here, but, I shall briefly refer to some examples to demonstrate the nature of this critique.

The African Theologian, Setiloane, identifies, for instance, four dimensions or phases in the history of the Christian tradition. The first is the early Christian church, followed by the development of the Western and Eastern churches after Byzantine Schism (433 AD); the Reformation; and the present development of African theology.(16) He characterises the Reformation as the phase which involved two centuries of missionary activity in Africa and elsewhere. For Setiloane the fourth dimension consists of a critique of Western forms of Christianity and cultural imperialism. As missionaries belonged to the third dimension and thus carriers of Western forms of Christianity and culture the fourth dimension naturally involved a critique of the role of missionaries in this regard. Africans here developed their own insights and interpretation based upon "Africanness". This activity was characterised by reactions to imported theology and demands for theological and political "decolonization".

Black theology, is similarly based on a critique of "white theology" in South Africa a theology characterised by white racism, Western cultural imperialism and colonial oppression and exploitation. As in African theology this led to a critique of the missionary enterprise in South Africa. Buthelezi, for instance, rejects the "ethnographic" approach of missionaries for the Church in Africa and their "indigenous theology" which led to the ethnic and racially divided churches. This approach reinforced ideologies of racial oppression and domination.

Buthelezi calls this the "occupational pet-project of missionaries".(17) For Buthelezi white missionaries happily occupy themselves with the ethnographic aspects while modern Africa's existential situation is characterized by oppression, and dehumanisation. He advances an alternative approach which he calls the "anthropological" approach which is based on the reality of the dehumanisation of Black people, and, envisages liberation from political oppression. He says that when we speak of the "anthropological" approach we are thinking, not of the "colonial person" who is the object of domination by other

people, a black problem to the white politicians, but a "post-colonial person" who has been liberated by Christ from all that dehumanizes.(18)

Taking this critique further from a Black theology perspective Goba says that Black theologians have "an obligation to debunk all the aspects of Western Christian tradition which have fostered and continue to perpetuate structures that dehumanise black people in the West as well as in the Third World". For many Black people in South Africa, say Goba, Christianity "represents a religion of the white oppressor" (19) which defends the status quo. Steve Biko called this type of religion a "cold, cruel religion" from Europe.(20) For Goba, therefore, "the quest for theological relevancy is a quest to move away from the captivity of the white theological establishment".(21) Black theology sees the Church in South Africa as an inherent part of the South African problematic. As Goba says, "to be part of the Christian Church in South Africa is to be captive to an institution which reflects the nature of our society with all its problems".(21)

2.3 THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH TO THE PERIOD OF EARLY
INDUSTRIALIZATION

The discovery of gold and diamonds at the end of the 19th century shifted the focus of conflict between races from the frontiers to the mining towns. Of value here is James Cochrane's research which deals with the period between 1903-1930, strongly characterised by the early stages of industrialisation in South Africa.(23) It is interesting to note in this context that although the apartheid system is associated with the Afrikaners and Nationalist Party rule from 1948, the development of many repressive and segregationalist laws and social structures in South Africa occurred during this early period of industrialisation.

Cochrane's historical survey of the period based on recent historiography, shows that the following laws were initiated to serve the interests of capital, overlaid as these were with racial prejudices used to justify the denial of the human dignity of the indigenous people:

- (1) The Native Recruitment Corporation (1912), established to ensure non-competitive and regular supplies of cheap labour from the so-called "native reserves".
- (2) The Land Act (1913), which dispossessed the Africans of their land and effectively forced many of them to work in the mines as migrant workers.
- (3) The Pass Laws, used to control movement of Africans and to ensure that their labour was available whenever it was needed.
- (4) The Poll Tax laws, which also forced indigenous people to go to the mines from time to time to raise the necessary cash to pay the poll tax.
- (5) The 1911 Mines and Works Act which reserved thirty two areas of employment for whites.

It would be too mechanistic and insufficiently differentiated to see this development purely as a direct consequence of capitalist interests, a tendency in Cochrane's work which emerges because of his dependence on revisionist historians of the 70's and early 80's whose work has been criticised on this point. Even so, Cochrane shows conclusively that throughout this period the Anglican and Methodist Churches conformed to the norms of the dominant capitalist and racist ethos notwithstanding their protest against some of these laws and practices from time to time. According to Cochrane they became more "servants of power" than servants of God.

The General Missionary Conference in 1904, for instance, was only concerned about "heathenism" and "Romanism". Two years later the Conference made a plea to watch over the interests of Native races and to influence legislation which affected them, although this was not taken further until 1928, when the conference addressed the question of the plight of blacks in the situation of intensified racial discrimination and oppression to serve the interests of capital. But again there was no attempt to deal with ways of stopping this violation and negation of the humanity of indigenous people. Instead the concern was still strongly that of evangelism than that of racial

justice whilst concurring with the mining bosses in their need for black labour.

In his Chapter " Church and Ideology: The First Thirty Years", Cochrane discusses the ideological captivity of the church to the "dominant capitalist colonial political economy" and its "distinct inability to bring to bear a critical and self-critical awareness of the implications of this situation". (24) He concludes

- i) that the Church failed during this period of early industrialization, to distinguish between the ruling ideology of the time and her own proclamation.(25)
- ii) that the Church's views were commonly shaped by a position of dominancy which dominance was "demonstrably capitalist" and served to restrain "those who were exploited and excluded from participation in the circles of social, political and economic power".(26)
- iii) that the Church demonstrated its captivity to the ruling class as it "refrained from exceeding the boundaries of debate set by the ruling political and economic powers".(27) Cochrane continues to say that in doing so the Church lost touch with the unique identity and role it might have gained had the mind

set, the world-view and the economic values of the dominant been cracked open by a meaningful response to the oppressed within its ranks".

The Church thus failed to find itself a unique voice and contribution, because it was functionally dependent on the dominant classes in society, that is, the rulers of the day. As a result of this functional dependency on the ruling class and on the industrial economy (28) the Church remained an ideological captive of these forces.

2.4 THE "CHURCH CLAUSE"

The next moment of history which is important to establish my thesis on the period prior to 1968 is the response of the Church to the controversial Clause 29(c) of the Native Laws Amendment Bill meant to impose racial segregation in church worship and services.

After the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948 segregationalist legislation was intensified and transformed into the ideology of apartheid, affecting every sphere of the life of the nation and the Church. Although the so-called English Speaking Churches protested against this move many pieces of legislation, including the Bantu Education Act, were

passed during the first decade of Nationalist rule.
Thus Villa-Vicencio notes that

...facing every intensifying pressure from the State, the English-speaking churches narrowed their sphere of involvement in the affairs of the nation, voluntarily surrendering space which had traditionally been theirs.(29)

But the crunch came in 1957 when the controversial "Church Clause" (Clause 29 (c) of the Native Laws Amendment Bill) was promulgated, to impose racial segregation in church worship and services. Although apartheid and segregationist laws affected the Church in one way or another this Bill was seen as directly threatening the life and worship of the Church. Protest to this signified the only moment in the history of the Church, during the period under review, when the Church threatened to move beyond just protest to resistance. In fact the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town threatened to call his priests and laity to engage in civil disobedience; a call supported by the other English speaking churches.

In a letter dated the 6th March 1957 addressed to the Prime Minister and signed by Geoffrey Clayton, the Archbishop of Cape Town, on behalf of the Bishops of

the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (CPSA), the Bishops stated that it was their belief that the Clause raised the issue of "religious freedom and more particularly that of freedom of worship".(30) The Clause, they stated, was an "infringement of religious freedom". They made it clear that the Church could not allow the government

to determine whether or not a member of the Church of any race ...shall discharge his religious duty of participation in public worship or to give instructions to the minister of any congregation as to whom he shall admit to membership of that congregation.

They recognised the gravity of disobedience to the law of the land but in this case they felt that if the Bill became law they would be "unable to obey it or counsel" their clergy and members to do so, because the matters dealt with in the "Church Clause" were God's and not Ceasar's.

The threat to defy the "Church Clause" was expressed by most English speaking churches in South Africa including the Baptist Union of South Africa, the Seventh Day Adventist and the Roman Catholic Church.

This was a significant shift in the tradition of these churches. As Michael Worsnip has said: "verbal protest had to a significant extent, given way to actual challenge and to the threat of disobedience".(31)

In a critical study of Geoffrey Clayton, Worsnip shows that the shift in Clayton's practice was because Clayton saw in the Bill "a threat to the institutions of the church". "Defiance", he says "was....the only way in which the church could protect its right to be the church", as Clayton understood this.(32) Worsnip argues that there was no change in Clayton's "thinking on matters of disobedience but rather that there was a change in the issues involved".(33) The issue for Clayton "was now the principle of religious freedom in which the church could not remain neutral". The Church here could not "merely oppose it verbally; it was forced to take action".(34)

In contrasting Clayton's position on this Clause with his response to the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Bantu Education Act (1953), Worsnip shows that though Clayton saw these laws as

unjust, they did not threaten the freedom of the Church to carry out its mission in this country. We may therefore conclude that what the Church was blind to is how the churches were corrupted by the colour bar. Thus Regehr notes that "though all the major denominations assert that scripture 'maintains the unity and solidarity' of mankind", none escapes the divisions that characterize life in an apartheid society". He continues to say that

the laws and customs that govern race relations in South Africa do not stop at the church door; they reach far into the body, compromising, thwarting and challenging both the spiritual and physical life of the church.... comprised not only of official policies and laws of the land, but of the prevailing temptation to adjust and conform to the prevailing ethic".(35)

Once again it was clear that this radical stand was taken because it was felt that the Clause was an attack on bona fide Church activity, that is an interference in, and an attack on, religious freedom. Villa Vicencio in his chapter on "Protest without Resistance" identifies this moment of the "Church Clause" as the only occasion when "protest threatened to become resistance".(36) Villa Vicencio then concludes that:

Important as this stand was, when seen in relation to other apartheid laws it suggests a disturbing parochialism which allows for a narrow and restricted sense of the limits of bona fide church identity and religious freedom. (37)

By doing so the Church allowed itself to be confined within the walls of its sanctuaries with tainted class rather than address the evils of apartheid which had a bearing on the Church however indirectly.

2.5 PROHIBITION OF THE ACCOMMODATION OF AFRICANS AT WILGESPRUIT FELLOWSHIP CENTRE

Another moment when the action of the government touched on the sensitive issue of freedom of religion and practice was in 1962 when the Roodepoort municipality incorporated the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre. According to the Native Urban Areas Act 25, of 1945, this meant that it became illegal for Africans to stay overnight at the Centre without permission from the Non-European Affairs Department. Consequently, the very intention of the establishment of the Centre (in 1949) to create the possibilities for white and black Christians to be under one roof and share one board in order to achieve and express effective fellowship in study and conference, as against the National Party apartheid policies introduced from 1948, was negated.

The Christian Council of South Africa (CCSA), which was legally responsible for the Centre, applied for exemption from the provisions of the Act in an interview with the Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Development in February 1964. But the Minister turned down the application in a reply dated the 24 April 1964.

Following this refusal the Executive Committee of the CCSA convened a summit meeting of Church leaders in May 1965. The summit, which was held in Bloemfontein,

- a. Reaffirmed the principle on which Wilgespruit was founded and continues to operate, viz:
 - i) that the church of Jesus Christ is every bit as much the church when it is in conference and study, as when it is in worship;
 - ii) that the church and the church alone has the right to regulate its own programme of study, worship and conference and to decide who may participate and how its programme is to be organised;
 - iii) that in order to achieve and express effectively fellowship in study and conference it is often both necessary and important that Christians of different races should be able to live under one roof and share common board.
- b. Drafted a letter to the Prime Minister (Dr Verwoerd) requesting (among other matters) exemption from the implementation of the Native Urban Areas Act in the case of church consultations.
- c. Agreed that should both permits and exemption be refused...the following alternatives stood out clearly:

- i) to sell the property and close down;
- ii) to seek an alternative site;
- iii) to continue in a restricted way on the present site;
- iv) to defy the State over this issue.(38)

As with the "Church Clause" the position of Church leaders shows that they were more concerned with permits on the basis of, and exemption from, the Native Urban Areas Act rather than the Act itself. In so far as it threatened the freedom of religion and the independence of the Church from earthly authority they were prepared to consider defiance.

It is now history that exemption was refused and that the Roodepoort Town Council followed this with a resolution to discontinue the issue of permits allowing Africans to be accommodated overnight at Wilgespruit. Faced with the responsibility of individual Africans being prosecuted in the event of any contravention of the law, if the defiance option was followed, the Executive Committee of the CCSA and the Management Committee of the Wilgespruit Centre agreed, in 1966, to opt to continue in a restricted way on the present site. They arranged to accommodate Africans overnight at St Ansgars, a mission next to the Centre where temporary residence of Africans was permitted in terms of the law.

This action was a definite surrender of the right of the Church to organise and regulate the "programme of study, worship and conference and to decide who may participate". It was a definite surrender of its freedom of religion and worship. The Church here allowed the State to attack the very life and essence of the Church.

The question one would ask is why the churches were prepared to carry out the threat of disobedience in the case of the "Church Clause" but gave in as far as Wilgespruit was concerned? The reason stated by the Executive of the CCSA and the Management Committee of Wilgespruit was the fact that it would be the African participants who would be prosecuted, if they followed the defiance option, rather than the Church. I would argue that this could not have been the major reason as the same conditions prevailed after the amendment of the "Church Clause". The "Church Clause" also made black worshippers the offenders if the law was disobeyed. But the churches then still committed themselves to defy the law. In July 1957 the Anglican Church sent pastoral letters to all their congregations in South Africa calling them to ignore the new Clause (39) and to disobey any notice of the government in this regard.(40)

An address to the South African Institute of Race Relations by Ambrose Reeves on the 3rd April 1957 on "The Bill and Religious Liberty" deals with this dilemma of the churches effectively. He said that

...[No]one of us can be unmindful that any church that decides to resist such unwarranted interference in the ordering of its own life in the secular authorities will expose its African members more especially to the penalties of such disobedience. This has made our decision to refuse to obey any order the Minister may issue when this Bill becomes law even harder to make. But we do not believe that to acquiesce in such interference would for one moment exempt our African Christian brethren from suffering for we should deny them that fellowship in worship and in life which they already have with us in some measure, and which we desire may yet be more completely expressed in our churches.(41)

I would like to suggest that the reason for the failure of the Church to act decisively in the case of Wilgespruit in obedience to God might well have been because the churches did not feel directly involved or that they were themselves not threatened by this act of government. Of course, this contradicts the principle Church leaders reaffirmed in 1965 in Bloemfontein, that "the church of Jesus Christ is every bit as much the church when it is in conference and study, as when it is in worship".

Notwithstanding this question, the point I would like to make here is that it is only in so far as the freedom of religion and of worship is threatened that the Church came close to an act of defiance beyond just protest.

2.6 CONCLUSION

From this selected overview of church practice in the period before 1968 one may conclude that:

- a. The practice of the Church was concerned more with the preservation of the freedom of worship and religious practice than change of society and its oppressive structures.
- b. That the practice of the Church in so far as social responsibilities were concerned consisted primarily of statements of condemnation and protest rather than programmes to resist or remove such evil structures and systems.
- c. That the practice of the Church conformed in the main to the dominant ideology and ethos of the time.

I have dealt with these selected historical moments prior to 1968 to establish the above thesis to lay the basis for a contrast with the period 1968-1988 which will be the focus of the next Chapter. I hope to show that 1968 signifies an important shift in the practice of the Church in South Africa. It signifies a shift from a sole concern for the preservation of the freedom of religious

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practice and of worship to active involvement to change
and challenge unjust structures of oppression and
exploitation.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH BETWEEN 1968-1974

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last Chapter I have indicated that the practice of the Church prior to 1968 was concerned more with the preservation of freedom of worship and religious practice than change of society and its oppressive structures. I have also noted that instead of engaging actively in programmes of change to eliminate apartheid or resist its build-up, the Church by and large made statements of condemnation and protest. From the analysis it is clear that the Church was deeply trapped within the dominant ideology of the dominant forces in South Africa.

In this Chapter and the following one I shall deal with the practice of the Church for the two decades starting from 1968 up to the Convocation of Churches

held in May 1988. I have given an overview of the period prior to this date to be able to contrast it with the next two decades which are characterized by a struggle to translate resolutions and statements of the Church into active engagement in programmes aimed at the elimination of the apartheid system. I hope to show that 1968 became a significant landmark of the beginning of an important shift in the practice of the Church in South Africa.

As I have said previously it is not my intention to present a detailed historical analysis of this period, but I intend to look at specific paradigmatic events which are pertinent to this study to make an analysis of what Frostin calls "a contrast experience".(1)

For this purpose therefore I have chosen to deal with the following in this Chapter:

1. "The Message to the People of South Africa"
2. The impact of the Programme to Combat Racism (WCC) on the churches in South Africa.
3. SPROCAS I and SPROCAS II
4. Black Consciousness and Black Theology, The Challenge of the Christian Institute,
5. the Conscientious Objection Resolution of the SACC (1974)

In the next Chapter I hope to show firstly that 1974 marked a turning point for the SACC and its members forcing them to take sides with the Victims of Apartheid. This position then leads to the second issue which is the legitimacy of Government. I will also show that this development culminated in the Convocation of Churches held in 1988 which gave birth to the Standing for the Truth Campaign.

3.2 1968: THE BEGINNING OF A NEW PHASE IN THE LIFE OF THE SACC CHURCHES

The publication of the "Message to the People of South Africa" signalled a new phase in the life of the SACC and its member churches. This new phase raised, in a more concrete way, three pertinent questions for the Church. The first question was that of marrying theory with practice. The second was that of violence and non-violence. And the third was the question of the neutrality of the Church in conflict situations.

John W de Gruchy describes this new phase in terms of

three developments which he sees as highly significant, particularly in relation to the SACC. First was the impact of the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism (PCR). Second was the related debate about violence and non-violence leading to the 1974 SACC National Conference resolution on Conscientious Objection. And last was the increasingly dominant role played by black leadership in the life of the churches.

(2)

The question is, what are the conditions which were responsible for ushering the Church into this new phase of existence? The conditions leading to this period can be traced back to the beginning of the decade of the 60's, beginning with the Sharpeville massacre in March 1960. This massacre was followed by a State of Emergency which led to the detention and imprisonment of thousands of blacks. Banning orders were slapped on some whilst many were forced into exile. Both the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan African Congress (PAC) were subsequently banned. The brutal and repressive actions of the apartheid government forced these traditionally non-violent and peaceful organisations to resort to the armed struggle as the only option left for them to end apartheid. This created a new political crisis for the

country and the churches. As De Gruchy notes that if the "Church Clause" in 1957 shocked the churches into action, the whole country was rudely awakened by Sharpeville.(3)

The immediate response of the Church to this crisis was to call the Cottesloe Consultation, held in Johannesburg from the 7-14 December, 1960. A reading of the report of the Consultation today leaves one with no doubt that the Consultation did not go far enough in its statement against apartheid and racism. But what is significant is that representatives of the Dutch Reformed Churches (NGK) were part of the statement which concluded that apartheid could not be reconciled with the teaching of scripture, and that all racial groups in South Africa had an "equal right to make their contribution towards the enrichment of life of their country and to share in the ensuing responsibilities, rewards and privileges".(4)

It is history now that the NGK delegates were reprimanded by the then Prime Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd, who effectively forced the majority of them to retract and the Cape and Transvaal synods of the NGK to fall into line. It is for this reason that Regehr describes Cottesloe as a "compromise that failed".(5)

But what finally forced the South African churches to address this new reality was the impact of the changes within the world ecumenical movement in which South African churches lagged far behind. The key to these changes was the 1966 WCC Conference on Church and Society in Geneva. Here the international church community was confronted by the cry of the Third World for justice and the related question of revolutionary struggles against injustices. This Conference triggered a series of activities, among them regional consultations in South Africa which led to the publication of the "Message to the People of South Africa", in August 1968.

3.3 "THE MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA"

The "Message to the People of South Africa" was prepared by a theological commission initially established because of a threat to the freedom of inter-racial gatherings following the insistence of the then Minister of Bantu Administration that all Africans would have to obtain permits to be able to use the Wilgespruit Centre.(6) Although leaders of member churches of the SACC started discussing this matter as early as 1965, the Commission was first established in 1966 after the Geneva

Conference. The mandate of the Commission was "to consider what obedience to God requires of the church in her witness to her unity in Christ in South Africa".(7)

Briefly, the "Message" set out the basic Christian principles of race relations. It went further than Cottetloe. Not only did it reject the theological justification for racism or apartheid, but it refuted any justification for "separate development" of race groups "as a way for the people of South Africa to save themselves" as opposed to the Gospel which "offers salvation, both social and individual through faith in Christ alone".(8) It warned that the system of racial segregation presented a threat to the very essence of the Church itself.(9) De Gruchy notes that "The Message aroused the feelings of white South Africa in a dramatic way because it went for the jugular vein in the body politic".(10)

But for the purposes of this study the significance of the "Message to the People of South Africa" is that it forced those Christians who responded to it to ask new questions about the life and witness of the churches. These questions were particularly related to the need to translate "confessing words" into "deeds", the need to

develop an "alternative consonant with christianity", in the place of apartheid which the "Message" rejected.(11)

These new questions led to a number of programmes and activities. One of these programmes was taken up by those who were developing an interest in the formation of a confessing church in South Africa. They formed what was called "obedience to God" groups, consisting mainly of members of the Christian Institute (CI). They regarded the "Message" as a confession of faith for South Africa and were committed to turn this confession to deeds.(12)

But the most extensive programme was the "Study Project on Christianity in an Apartheid Society" (SPROCAS). SPROCAS, particularly the report of the Commission on "Apartheid and the Church" led to a sustained period of self-examination and self-critique for the churches.(13) SPROCAS I, as this first project was known, was followed by the "action-oriented" follow-up programme called SPROCAS II (Special Project for Christian Action in Society).(14) These two projects will be discussed later in this Chapter. A preliminary comment I want to make is that Sprocas II went much further than the Church Commission, and increasingly included a critique of the South African economy.

Whilst one accepts that the "Message" and SPROCAS I and II generated some attempts to try to move beyond statements to action and that it also created the necessary conditions to do so, it seems that what eventually forced the SACC and its member churches to struggle to move beyond reports, statements and debates was the WCC's Programme to Combat Racism, and its related Special Fund. (15)

3.4 THE PROGRAMME TO COMBAT RACISM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN CHURCHES

The 1966 WCC Conference on Church and Society was followed by the Fourth Assembly of the WCC held at Uppsala in 1968. Here plans were set in motion to establish a programme for the elimination of racism throughout the world. Following the proposals by a subsequent Consultation on Racism held at Notting Hill near London, in 1969, the Central Committee of the WCC meeting in Canterbury, from the 12th-22nd August 1969, endorsed the recommendation to set up a programme which was to be called "Programme to Combat Racism". This programme included "action-oriented research, information, church mobilization and support for racially opposed groups". (16)

The Central Committee's endorsement of this programme was a clear indication that the WCC had moved beyond talking about the evils of racism and making statements of condemnation without taking any concrete action to end it. Thus its recommendation regarding the PCR' the Central Committee called upon churches:

to move beyond charity, grants and traditional programming to relevant and sacrificial action leading to new relationships of dignity and justice among all men (sic) and to be agents for a radical reconstruction of society.(17)

As an indication of the WCC's seriousness and commitment on this issue the Executive Committee went further by resolving in 1970 at Arnoldshain, West Germany, to establish a Special Fund. This Fund would support liberation movements worldwide, among them those engaged in struggles against white minority regimes in Southern Africa. The WCC therefore took practical steps by planning, a radical reconstruction of society. It committed itself to a programme to eliminate racism world-wide.

It is well known that South African churches were shocked by this decision of the WCC and were forced to reject the PCR's method of seeking change in

Southern Africa.(18) But what makes the WCC's Programme to Combat Racism significant for this study is that although churches rejected it, this action by the WCC helped, first, to expose the failures of the Church in South Africa in its mission within an apartheid society. Second, it helped lay the grounds for the exposure of the hypocrisy of the South African churches as far as the violence and non-violence issue is concerned. This hypocrisy became evident when the SACC National Conference in 1974 dealt with the Conscientious Objection Resolution, with which I will deal later.

The SACC, in its response to the WCC decision on racism (that force may be resorted to by Christians in order to dislodge entrenched injustice) admitted that this decision was reached "at least in part on account of the failure of the churches".(19) They accepted the fact that they had failed to translate their statements and resolutions into action; and that although they had protested against apartheid, their own structures and practice showed the opposite, as confirmed by the SPROCAS Report. The fact that the SACC member churches were implicated in the perpetuation of apartheid within their own structures created a credibility crisis in terms of

their mission and their witness against racism.

In an attempt to address this crisis within the Church, and also to end apartheid in society, the member churches of the SACC undertook actions parallel to the PCR programme. These actions were understood to be peaceful means of change as opposed to the PCR's Special Fund, which was seen to support a violent way of change. Regehr puts it succinctly as follows:

As part of their work towards political change, the churches renewed their efforts to clean up their own ecclesiastical back yards, and in particular created their own variations of "programmes to combat racism"... In direct response to the WCC program, churches have set up special programmes to monitor and combat racism within their own structures and to bring the prophesy of their church to bear upon the national life.(20)

Regehr further identifies three distinct foci regarding change:

1. The struggle to change their (the church's) own structures to be compatible with the recommended structures of South African society. That is, the church had to be a "prototype" of this future society.(21)
2. Action directed towards the reform of the white power structure. This was expressed later in three forms. First, it was expressed in the form of the Conscientious Objection resolution (1974); second, in the form of the 1977 theological statement on the work of the SACC circulated among member churches; and third in the form of the

resolution raising the question of foreign investments in South Africa.(22)

3. Action to develop and mobilize resources of the oppressed majority in the form of community development programmes and relief assistance to victims of the apartheid system.(23)

In this regard, for instance, the Anglican Church undertook a two pronged strategy; a programme on Human Relations and Reconciliation, and community development programmes.(24)

Of significance during this period was the establishment of the Division for Justice and Reconciliation (J&R) within the SACC which was described by SACC officials as a "creative response" to the WCC Programme to Combat Racism (27). It was established following a resolution of the 1970 Methodist Conference which requested the SACC to sponsor a study Conference "to investigate further ways and means whereby the Churches of South Africa may more fully exercise a ministry of reconciliation". Thomas also confirms this view on the formation of the J&R division. He presents it as an "alternative" to the WCC's, Programme to Combat Racism and further says that the establishment of the J&R Division was also a way of indicating to the WCC that peaceful change was possible in South Africa.(26)

The specific reasons advanced for setting up these programmes by those who did so are less important than the recognition that the WCC's PCR forced the churches in South Africa to engage in practical programmes to correct the situation both in the Church and in society.

The next section goes back to the SPROCAS programmes which is critical in this struggle to correct the unjust situation in South Africa. The programmes happened almost at the same time as the debate on the PCR. They shed light on the ideological constraints the Church is subjected to as it struggles to move from protest to action to remove the injustices of the apartheid system in South Africa.

3.5 SPROCAS I AND SPROCAS II

3.5.1 The Development and Programmes of SPROCAS I and SPROCAS II

Earlier we showed the significance of the "Message to the People of South Africa" noting that this Message led to numerous programmes which attempted to follow-up on its

practical implications. Two of the most important programmes to arise out of the Message were the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (SPRO-CAS I) and the subsequent Special Project for Christian Social Action (SPRO-CAS II). SPRO-CAS I was established jointly by the SACC and the CI in 1969 to examine the implications of the Message, in applying Christian principles to the major areas of the national life in an apartheid South Africa, and to make recommendations for a more just social order. The aims of SPRO-CAS 1 were stated as follows:

- (1) to examine South African society in the light of Christian principles, as expressed in the Message:
- (2) to formulate long-term goals for an acceptable social order; and,
- (3) to consider how change towards such a social order might be accomplished.(27)

The study process and research work involved a total body of about 150 experts who came from different backgrounds, different disciplines and different parts of the country. Six study commissions on Apartheid and Society; Economy; Education; Law; Politics; and the Church were constituted. The commissions met regularly over a period of two years and produced valuable reports on these areas of study. The reports were published between August 1971 and June 1973.

SPROCAS II was a logical consequence of the work of SPROCAS I Study Commission. The initial aims of SPROCAS II were first to implement the recommendations of SPROCAS I which were immediately practicable and, secondly, to prepare the ground for the eventual implementation of the long-term recommendations. Whilst the accent of SPROCAS I was on research and study SPROCAS II focused on action and implementation.

Four major areas of action were identified as Education, Labour, Church and Social issues. To achieve this the following programmes were developed amongst others; the Black Community Programme, (BCP) the White Community Programme, (WCP) the Education Programme, the Labour Programme, the Church Programme, Social issues, a Publications Programme, and special Research.

3.5.2 Critique of Sprocas 1

Although Peter Randall referred to the proposals of the SPROCAS 1 Commissions as "far reaching" for change in South Africa in the direction of a "just, non-discriminatory society" (28) a critical study of the

reports of the study commissions shows that SPROCAS I failed to move beyond the white liberal tradition in South Africa. The comment of Dr Oscar Wollheim on SPROCAS Publication Number 10 is very instructive in this regard. He said that

I support the broad direction of the report, especially where it indicates a movement towards a more open society. I do not agree with the majority report in its trend to lay emphasis on the group especially where such groups are based on artificial lines of colour and not on common interest. I further dislike the suggestion that such colour groups should be consolidated and extended by the creation of more Group Areas. (29)

Dr Edgar H Brookes, in his minority report, argues that as good South Africans his colleagues subconsciously considered the impact of the report on white voters and forgot the impact it would have on the black community and on world Christian consciousness. He says that the report demolishes

traditional British and American liberalism, very largely because it makes groups the basis of society and not individuals. This turning from the individual to the group gives its direction to the whole report, which aims at producing ultimately a state where groups will co-operate for the commonwealth. But these are still groups, and groups based mainly on race or colour. The Commission, in short, proposes to cast out Beelzebub by Beelzebub. It assumes that this working through groups will bring us closer together, but is this assumption justified? (30)

Brookes concludes by saying that he remains an "unreconstructed" liberal and thus must dissent from many of the main recommendations of the report.

The focus of SPROCAS I was clearly on the apartheid system. Whites were the object of the study as the agents of change rather than blacks as is demonstrated by remarks from Randall in the first occasional publication where he clearly starts from the assumption that "significant change in the near future can only come from within the white group, and more particularly from within the ruling political party".(31) The basic assumption which leads him to this conclusion is that he could not see any possibility of an internal revolution or any meaningful form of foreign intervention. Randall, of course, has since moved from this position as evidenced by his total commitment to SPROCAS II which I will deal with later.

As a result of this focus, SPROCAS I failed to take seriously the concerns of blacks, as Brookes argued. It concerned itself mainly with the sensitivities of whites and thus remained captive to the dominant white system. The Eloff Commission Report on SPROCAS I is instructive in this respect. It says that:

what is not without significance is that what was suggested at that time was steady change in many fields, and that radical change was not urged in all the reports.(32)

In the Anatomy of Apartheid, a SPROCAS publication, the report deals with the "Theoretical Perspectives of the South African society". It dismisses the use of inherent differences between races as simplistic and based on ignorance and myth. It shows that research has also failed to support the presupposition that white South Africans are more particularly inclined to prejudiced behaviour than other whites of European stock. It asserts, instead, that for an understanding of the South African society and its complex problems one needs to look at the "collective interest and fears" of whites rather than at their personalities.(33)

Taking this theme of collective interests further the report shows that the pattern of the South African society was that of colonial society structured to secure the economic interest of the dominant white group. The lines of economic conflict here are overlaid by racial divisions.

It is suprising though that the report did not follow through to the logical conclusion that economic interests were part of the foundation for the apartheid system although this debate raged on

at other levels of discourse on the South African reality. The report instead reverted to race as the focus for its recommendations.

The SPROCAS reports also show that the system of apartheid conceals the reality of the South African situation on the basis of racial stereotypes and prejudice. The first report of SPROCAS, for instance, suggests that there is no deliberate deception by whites in general nor do they necessarily deliberately exploit blacks. But claims, that cultural differences, prejudice, negative stereotypes of other races are to a large extent the framework within which whites generally see the situation in South Africa.

What is surprising is that the SPROCAS reports are conscious of the reality referred to above but the conclusions drawn simply discard this reality. We shall try later to explain this obvious contradiction and illogicality by using Marx's concept of negative ideology to expose this tendency to avoid reality, or the tendency to try to conceal reality in order to preserve self or group interests.

Although SPROCAS I was essentially an intellectual and educational effort it nevertheless remains important insofar as it raised the theological and political consciousness of those who worked on its commissions and those who read its reports (although Peter Walshe believes "that it was naive to assume that providing information to whites about injustices wrought by existing policies and offering alternative policies would prompt them to vigorously take a stand against apartheid".(34)

3.5.3 **SPROCAS II: AN ATTEMPT TO MOVE THE CHURCH INTO ACTION**

The "Special Project on Christian Action in Society" (SPROCAS II) attempted to move beyond just studies and statements to a programme of action to try to establish a new social order in South Africa. From the list of programmes listed above it is clear that the broad strategic considerations of SPROCAS II were significant and showed a definite shift from traditional ways of dealing with the problems of society. The programmes of SPROCAS II consciously co-operated with forces in society which were working for social change. Ben Khoapa a leading figure in SPROCAS II, in a paper on "tentative

suggestions for action" for Black Community Programmes, presents a continuum of contrasts between concepts used in the old tradition and the new emerging tradition which suggest "the dimensions these shift in emphasis must take as we participate responsively in the transformation of the Black Communities". These shifts are:

from service (charity) to action (reform), from symptoms to causes, from working alone to working with others, from responsible people to responsive people, from diffusion to power, from doing for the poor to working with and under, from white men working in Black communities to black men working in black communities.(35)

The above judgements concerning the import of the SPROCAS venture finds interesting support in government circles. Thus, in characterizing the SPROCAS I and II, with particular reference to the latter the Eloff Commission Report says that:

We have dealt at some length with SPROCAS I and II in the brief historical overview. The reason for this is that these projects demonstrated the first calculated venture into the socio-political and economic fields by the SACC based on its theological understanding that it should evince socio-political involvement. These definitive actions aimed at promoting its perceptions of a more just society, through a radical transformation of the existing one, and led by SPROCAS II were supported by certain member churches when they succeeded after a long struggle in having a Division of Justice and Reconciliation established in the SACC, imitating the WCC initiative with its establishment of the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR).(36)

Similarly, Dr Denis Worall's critique of the development and direction of SPROCAS II clearly points to the nature of the SPROCAS II programme. In a personal statement published in SPROCAS Publication Number 10, he said that he had watched the increasingly "activistic role" of the SPROCAS II Programme since its formation in 1972 with "growing dismay". He continues to say,

....I strongly disagree with some of the positions it has adopted and find much of the literature which it has put out to be embarrassingly polemical by any scholarly standard.(37)

Although this statement indicates dissatisfaction with the quality and character of the Publications of SPROCAS II, and whilst I also value intellectual rigour in research, the concern about the "activist role" of the SPROCAS II Programme suggests a discomfort in moving from intellectual research (theory) to action (practice). The pretence of "neutrality" and or "objectivity" has often been used as a basis to avoid involvement in action to eradicate the apartheid system.

Studies of SPROCAS II shows that SPROCAS II ushered a new phase in the life of the Church. As De Gruchy put it, "previously the accent had been on study, but now the emphasis shifted to action and implementation".(38)

Peter Walshe, in characterizing the change in stance of the CI in this regard described this as a parting of company with "the old liberal illusion that change could be effected solely by education and moral appeals directed at the privileged".(39)

During my reading of contemporary ecclesiastical historical material I noted a conspicuous absence of discussion on SPROCAS II. Most historical discourses on the Church concentrate on the report on "Apartheid and the Church" rather than on SPROCAS II. From the discourse and practice of the Church in the last one and a half decades there is apparently a trend or tendency to consciously or unconsciously exile SPROCAS II from historical records and pretend that it did not exist. Perhaps one may judge that this occurs in order to avoid the consequences and implications of building further on it?

SPROCAS II will remain, I believe, an indelible event that marked an attempted shift to move the Church into action to eliminate apartheid.

3.6 THE CHALLENGE OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND BLACK THEOLOGY

Earlier we referred to three developments which

characterise the new phase ushered at the end of the sixties. The first was the impact of the WCC's Programme to Combat Racism; the second was the related debate about violence and non-violence leading to the 1974 SACC National Conference resolution on Conscientious Objection. The third is the increasingly dominant role played by black leadership in the life of the churches in South Africa. It is to this last that we now turn.

The emergence of the Black Consciousness movement in the late sixties and early seventies spearheaded by Black students "added a new urgency to the South African churches' relation with the state".(40) Under the leadership of Steve Bantu Biko the South African Student Organisation (SASO) was formed, and it became the vanguard and custodian of the ideology of Black Consciousness.

Because of the Black Consciousness Movement black people developed a new liberating consciousness as they struggled to liberate themselves both physically and psychologically. Blacks no longer defined themselves in terms of "their masters' voice" and language. They redefined "blackness" and reinterpreted the black experience. They reasserted the humanity of black people

and rejected those ideologies or structures which negated their humanity or which dehumanised them. They rejected terms such as "non-Europeans", "non-whites", etc., which presented blacks in the negative image of whites.

Instead they boldly described themselves as "black" and asserted that "black is beautiful" in defiance of the system of white racism and arrogance. The clarion call, "blackman you are on your own" signified the end of relationships of dependency and paternalism, and the influence of white liberalism. It put the initiative in determining their future and destiny into their own hands.

To this end with the help of the Christian Institute and the SACC, the Black Community Programmes (BCP) were initiated to help the Black Community to be aware of its own identity; to create a sense of its power; to organise itself; to analyse its own needs and problems; to mobilise its resources to meet its needs; and to develop black leadership capable of guiding the development of black communities.(41) In short it aimed at empowering Black people to undertake their own struggles for liberation.

This development also led to the emergence of Black Theology. The project of Black Theology engaged in an

exercise of trying to understand faith from the black experience, asserting that blacks were made in the image of God and thus must be treated as equals with whites. Black Theology used the Christian tradition and the Biblical sources to expose white racism even within liberal tendencies to "champion the course of the native" and to, confront oppressive structures and the domination of blacks by whites in the Church. In short, Black Theology helped black Christians to reappropriate the means of the production of theology to challenge a dominant theology of the white church establishment.

"Through the parallel phenomena of Black Consciousness and Black Theology", says Regehr, "white hegemony in South Africa received its greatest challenge".(42) This challenge was not only in society but also within the Church.

As the churches did in response to the PCR, instead of addressing the issues raised by the Black Consciousness and Black Theology movements directly, they saw these movements as an indictment against the churches' failure to eliminate racism. They instead renewed their "efforts to promote political change rather than in any specific responses to the Black Consciousness movement".(43) In response to the efforts of the churches to "clean up

their own ecclesiastical back yards" therefore the Black Consciousness movement challenged the so-called multi-racial churches "to increase their efforts to bring about fundamental changes in South African social, economic and political structures".(44)

This new climate created new possibilities for black leadership within the churches. By 1972, for instance, the National Conference of the SACC became majority black (25 Blacks and 24 Whites), although Thomas attributes this to what he calls "mechanical indigenisation of black churches founded by mission societies".(47)

During the 1971 National Conference the General Secretary of the SACC, John Rees, said that from then on the SACC would deliberately seek to reflect the black majority situation of its membership both in its committees and in its staff complement. In fact, the first black majority executive was elected and a black President, Rev August Habelgaarn of the Moravian Church, came into office.(46) He was followed by Rev John Thorne a black Congregationalist, in 1975 as President of the SACC. It was at the 1975 conference that the General Secretary, John Rees, said that "....the future of South Africa is now firmly in the hands of black men".(47) By 1977 the first black General Secretary was appointed, namely, Rev John Thorne,

to be followed soon after by Bishop Desmond Tutu.

This indigenisation process and the spirit of Black Consciousness enabled Blacks to put forward their point of view much more forcefully from an official power base within the Churches, thus putting an end to the long period of white liberal dominance. The presence of a black majority in the SACC had, indeed a major impact on its thinking since then. (48)

3.7 THE CHALLENGE OF THE CHRISTIAN INSTITUTE (CI)

The Christian Institute (CI) was initiated in 1963 by a group of Afrikaners who were frustrated by the stand of the DRC at Cottesloe. It was formed around the witness of Dr Beyers Naude against the support for apartheid by the DRC. Initially its base remained among conservative Afrikaners, but their support dwindled quite early in the life of the Institute in the face of hostility of the DRC church hierarchy, the Afrikaner press and the government. This loss of support was also later hastened by the shift of the Institute from reformist to radical positions on the nature of racist structures of the South African society.

The suprising aspect of this development is that within a few years the Christian Institute began to play an important role in exploring new grounds of Christian witness in a context of apartheid oppression. In fact, the Christian Institute began to move ahead of the CCSA, (later known as the SACC), in its prophetic witness. By 1976 when the Board of Management of the CI took a stand on sanctions and on the liberation movements, following resolutions of the WCC on the PCR and on sanctions, even white English speaking liberals no longer felt at home within the Institute. The Institute, therefore, became radicalized as time went by and moved beyond the liberal English speaking tradition to identify itself with the struggles of black people.

The question which could be asked is why the Institute moved ahead of the CCSA and later the SACC? There are a number of reasons that could be advanced. First, the Institute was a small organisation with individual membership rather than institutional church membership, thus, it was "more flexible and its leadership more progressive in exploring the social implications of the Gospel". (49) Second, from 1968 the Institute and the SACC were housed in the same building. This physical proximity and the fact that Beyers Naude sat on the

Executive Committee of the SACC as a co-opted member created a situation where the SACC was "continually exposed to the "inputs" and actions of the CI".(50)

Third, the shift of the CI was particularly influenced by the emergence of Black Consciousness and Black Theology. (51)

A number of events in the life of the Institute show how it led, facilitated and impacted on the SACC and its member churches in terms of their ministry in a crisis situation. Early in 1968, the Christian Institute jointly convened a National Conference on Church and Society with the CCSA. This Conference was followed by another in May on the "Pseudo-gospel" in Church and Society. Consequently an interdenominational theological commission was constituted by the SACC out of this Conference. It is this commission which issued the "Message to the People of South Africa" in September 1968 which, as noted above, signalled the beginning of a new phase in the life of the SACC related churches.

Similarly on the basis of the Message, SPROCAS I was set up under the joint sponsorship of the SACC and the Christian Institute, and it was the latter who played an even stronger role in supporting SPROCAS II (Special Program for Christian Action in society). SPROCAS II, in turn,

gave birth to the Black Community Programmes (BCP), made famous through the involvement of Steve Biko. This alone indicates the extent to which the Christian Institute led the way in facilitating the process of enabling blacks to take responsibility for their lives and own destiny.

A reading of the history of the CI from 1968 to 1977, when it was slapped with a banning order, shows that the Institute led the Church in discussions on disinvestments, on questions of civil disobedience, in the conscientious objection campaign, and in reassessing the role of the liberation movements in South Africa.

As early as 1972 Naude and the editor of the *Pro Veritate*, Roelf Meyer, argued in favour of foreign disinvestments in South Africa before any of the churches in the SACC began even to discuss the matter. And in September 1976 the Board of Management of the CI adopted two resolutions: one on sanctions and boycotts, and another on the liberation movements, before the SACC had acted on these issues. They resolved to support "in principle the use of sanctions and boycott as the last peaceful means of persuading whites to accept change...."and secondly, they also expressed support for the aims of the liberation movements insofar as these were consistent with the criteria of the gospel.(52)

A significant moment in the life of the Christian Institute is its defiance of the Schlebusch Commission in 1973. The Schlebusch Commission was appointed by the Vorster government to investigate organisations the government suspected of "subversion". The CI objected to the Commission because it was to be conducted by party politicians in complete secrecy, and, that it was to be used as a vehicle to justify arbitrary action by the government against its opponents. This was confirmed by the government action against NUSAS. This caused Beyers Naude and several other CI staff and board members to decide not to give evidence. °

In preparation of the trial a statement of defiance entitled Divine or Civil Disobedience? was produced, setting out the Scriptural basis for the right to resist unchristian governmental authority in the name of the Lord. (53) In this document they argued that "the believer in Christ not only has the right, but the responsibility to hearken to the Word of God and his righteousness rather than to the government, should the Government deviate from God's will". In a form of rhetorical questions they asserted that responsibility lay with a Christian not to cooperate with the Government in a matter which is in conflict with the Gospel. That

by doing so the Christian will be "witnessing to Christ and his righteousness".(54) They then appeal to the authority of theologians such as Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, John Knox and others.

The significance of this moment in the life of the CI is that the CI followed this act of defiance to its logical conclusion until they were given sentences. This laid the foundation for subsequent acts of disobedience culminating in the decision of the Convocation of Churches in May 1988 on this matter. Thus the CI provided leadership in this regard as well acting as a prophetic challenge to the churches at that time.

That Naude was the seconder, and one of the prime movers of the SACC resolution on Conscientious Objection is no accident. The Christian Institute had already debated and applied its mind to this question and the question of violence and non-violence.

Thus Randall notes that "underlying all these was an acceptance, by the early 1970's that fundamental change in the country would be initiated and ultimately implemented by blacks, and that whites wishing to be part of the process of liberation had to act in a largely supportive role".(55)

To sum up, through ecumenical cooperation and interaction with the CCSA and later the SACC the Christian Institute was able to impact on the SACC and its member churches. It was gradually able to "move the discussion from an emerging consensus on principle to church practice". This led to a shift eventually of the "focus of praxis...from charity to public policy and justice as a pre-requisite for reconciliation".(56) It remained a challenge to the SACC until the time of its banning. As B Burnett, the then Secretary of the CCSA, said at a general meeting of the CI, in September 1967, the CI was "a witness to our freedom and the gospel." (57)

3.8 CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION AND MILITARY CHAPLAINCY

As I have shown in the discussion on the PCR, the struggle of liberation movements in Southern Africa raised the question of violence for the Church as never before.

In a case study undertaken by Wolfram Kistner on the background and the context of the resolution of the SACC on Conscientious Objection, Kistner says that "the resolution has at least had the effect of causing many South African (sic) to think of the problem of war and

violence even if they were not prepared to support the resolution"(58). It also forced the churches to raise questions for the first time about participation in the South African Defence Force (SADF). One should recall that although none of the SACC member churches stood in the pacifist tradition, they committed themselves to a non-violent stance by categorically rejecting violence as a means either of defending or attacking apartheid.

This position of the SACC member churches was taken in response to the PCR Special Fund which was seen as supporting violence as a means of change. But the SACC did not take this decision to its logical conclusion. It only addressed to the question of attacking or changing apartheid through violence but did not address the violence used to defend the status quo until 1974 when the SACC adopted the Conscientious Objection resolution. The Conscientious Objection resolution of the SACC was therefore part of the effort by churches to formulate a consistent response to the issue of violence in South Africa.

There are various factors which led to the adoption of the Conscientious Objection resolution in 1974. The intensification of the militarization of South Africa, the escalation of the war in Angola, and Frelimo's ascent to power in Mozambique all contributed to the milieu

within which questions about military service were raised.

Second, many felt that to reject the PCR's Special Programme was to deal only with the violence of the liberation movements, but not to address the growing violence and military action of South African forces. One may argue, therefore, that the position adopted by South African churches against the PCR's Special Programme was clearly not compatible with their relative silence on the violence of the Apartheid system.

Third, the May 1974 conference of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), held in Lusaka, exposed South African delegates to the liberation movements. The representatives of the liberation movements made a deep impression on South African participants especially because there were amongst them convicted christians who did not see any contradiction in the armed struggle and their Christian faith.(59) It became clear to those who attended this conference that they could not continue to deny the inevitability of violence because of the intransigence of whites and their unwillingness to share.(60) South African participants came out convinced that action needed to be taken to avert this situation. This experience exposed the superficial approach into the

complexities of violence in South Africa.

For all these reasons the resolution on Conscientious Objection deplored violence as a means of resolving problems and called on all Christians to consider "whether Christ's call to take up the cross and follow Him in identifying with the oppressed does not, in our situation, involve becoming conscientious objectors". It further called on the member churches of the SACC who had chaplains in the military forces of South Africa "to consider the basis on which they are appointed and to investigate the state of pastoral care available to the communicants at present in exile or under arms beyond our borders and to seek ways and means of ensuring that such pastoral care may be properly exercised".(61)

There was however, strong resistance from the floor of the Conference to this resolution. As David Thomas put it:

Realizing the importance of the resolution and its likely repercussions in South Africa, whose white population was extremely nervous of the "terrorist threat" following the fall of Angola and Mozambique, several white delegates resisted the resolution strongly.(62)

Chief amongst those who resisted the resolution were Bishop Phillip Russell of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, and the Rev Peter Storey of the

Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Bishop Russell proposed that the motion be referred to the Churches for discussion and that they "move on to the next item of business". His seconder was the Rev A Sprunger of the Presbyterian Church of Africa. The motion was defeated by 45 votes against 4, with 2 abstentions.

The Rev P Storey, seconded by Bishop Phillip Russell, proposed an amendment which had the effect of toning down those aspects of the motion which were seen as controversial. This amendment was defeated as well. After five hours of debate, with 39 of the 56 voting delegates being black, the Bax-Naude resolution was finally accepted in more or less its original form, and with its original force intact.(63)

It is instructive to note that Bishop Phillip Russell also led the attack on the Special Fund of the PCR at the 1975 WCC General Assembly in Nairobi, as is clear from the following motion of his to that Assembly:

We recommend that the churches do not support the Programme to Combat Racism and the Special Fund unless an assurance is given that no assistance will be given from the Special Fund to organisations that at the time of their application are such that their course of action is likely to cause the inflicting of serious injury or the taking of life.(64)

The motion was defeated as well with 325 votes against 62, and 22 abstentions.

In an interview with Phillip Russell in 1991 (65), on his stand, in relation to the Conscientious Objection Resolution, he expressed his concern that the resolution was:

- 1) the first serious issue which the Council was ever faced with throughout his life and experience within the ecumenical movement since 1951. The resolution he felt had a higher risk of dividing the churches; and,
- 2) that the resolution was raised from the floor without first getting the position of the churches. He admitted, though, that this was not usually the procedure followed by the Council as it was not yet confronted by a matter of such grave nature.

The fact that the same people opposed both the PCR's Special Fund and the Conscientious Objection resolution shows a contradiction which suggests a serious ideological problem. This ideological position is expressed in the form of different attitudes to the violence of the oppressed as opposed to that of the oppressor. Phillip Russell's explanation of this seemingly contradictory position is that these events must be seen within their own context and time. He makes a number of points in this regard. Among other things he says that:

- 1) prior to 1974, and particularly before June 1976 events, and the appointment of Desmond Tutu as General Secretary of the SACC, the Council was a white organisation with a predominantly white leadership. The meetings of the SACC were "white" meetings with one or two blacks;
- 2) white Church Leaders on their own had no possibility of knowing the "other point of view", meaning the black perspective;
- 3) when the presence of blacks and their participation increased, the interaction began to change the nature, character and thinking of the SACC. His opinion is that Desmond Tutu actually broke the white tradition of the SACC, changing it into an organisation which focused on the black experience and concerns of victims of apartheid;
- 4) churches and individuals (whites in particular) changed with more exposure and dialogue, and thus the SACC also changed. He referred in this regard to the change he had personally undergone over the years since then.

In answering the question as to why some of the "white" members of the SACC had difficulty in entertaining or voting for the Conscientious Objection Resolution and why they also opposed the PCR, David Thomas argues that the problem may have been the constraints of the framework of thought of the liberal tradition. He suggests that "respect for the law" of the land in this tradition was fundamental in shaping attitudes to the kind of challenge represented by conscientious objection, for example. Here you could argue for the repeal of the law but "you don't challenge the law". He notes further that the

liberal tradition developed within a context where they were the makers of the law and thus had respect for it.(66)

In this regard, Wolfram Kistner has pointed out that "Frequently one hears Christians who are engaged in working for change of the present structures using the argument we do nothing against the law, as if this were a moral justification of their actions".(67) This he suggests, is the "weakness and absurdity of a positivistic concept of law and justice which is "pronounced even in churches". (68)

Thomas further believes that there was the fear at the Conference that an adoption of the Conscientious Objection resolution would cause the wrath of the state to descend on the SACC. (69)

The response of member churches to the Conscientious Objection resolution was revealing. Member Churches of the SACC which dissociated themselves from this resolution were those which were mostly or entirely white, such as the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (PCSA) whilst those churches which were entirely or largely black supported the resolution.(70)

In this respect it is significant to note that in the case of the Special Fund of the Programme to Combat Racism it was only the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (PCSA) which came close to withdrawing its membership from the WCC when in 1971 its "Executive Commission" voted in favour of withdrawal.(71) But at its General Assembly the motion that "the Assembly terminates the membership of the PCSA in the World Council of Churches" was defeated by 75 votes against 57. And in a subsequent resolution the General Assembly reminded the Prime Minister, who threatened the Churches and coerced them to withdraw from the WCC, that

its only Lord and Master is Jesus Christ, that it may not serve other masters and that its task is not necessarily to support the politics of the Government in power but to be faithful to the Gospel of its Lord and to seek justice for the afflicted and liberty for those who are oppressed.(72)

Some use the comments of Bishop Alpheus Zulu, the then Anglican Bishop of Zululand and one of the Presidents of the WCC, to show that even blacks questioned the WCC's Special Fund. (73) In his initial reaction he stated that the South African churches had not been consulted and that for this reason the "SACC should lodge its protest and demand to be heard".(74) But this could have been a legitimate question about consultations rather than a question on the matter itself, although one has to

take into consideration the fact that Bishop Zulu was part of the South African Fellowship of Reconciliation (SAFOR), a pacifist organisation, and thus could have been influenced by that background.

Some doubt about Bishop Zulu's position remains, however, for it was he who later said, that it was unreasonable to expect blacks to be committed to non-violence when very few whites were. He continued to say that:

After the disillusionment that followed the quelling of black resistance movements in the middle fifties, it has become unreasonable to gain support for the hope of a non-violent solution. The harshness with which discrimination is enforced by law and custom makes a black man look simple and naive if he continues to believe and talk of non-violence ever becoming effective. This is a fact even though nobody speaks of violence. (75)

The reaction from the white community to the decision on the Conscientious Objection resolution as expected, was hostile and in the main they chose not to understand the meaning of the resolution. Some newspapers saw this resolution as suggesting that South Africa must submit to "terrorism". This, to them, was the same as the WCC's aid to "terrorist" movements. Government action was as strong as it was against Cottessloe, the "Message", and the WCC's Special Fund of the Programme to Combat Racism. The then Minister of Defence, P W Botha,

immediately introduced a Defence Amendment Bill criminalising any positive discussion of conscientious objection.

But the reality is that the churches were simply working through the implications of the stand they took in their response to the PCR's Special Fund. They had unanimously committed themselves to a non-violent stance with regard both to defending and attacking apartheid, although they did not withdraw their military chaplains from the SADF.

Indeed the Conscientious Objection resolution had also dealt with the question of chaplaincy. It questioned "the basis upon which chaplains are seconded to the military forces lest their presence indicate moral support for the defence of our unjust and discriminatory society", and then called on member churches who have chaplains in the military forces "to reconsider the basis on which they are appointed and to investigate the state of pastoral care available to the communicants at present in exile or under arms beyond our borders and to seek ways and means of ensuring that such pastoral care may be properly exercised".

This resolution was followed by heated debates during synods and assemblies of churches through 1976 and 1977.

Again the division on the matter was largely between blacks and whites. Blacks saw chaplaincy to the SADF as an act of support for the racist oppressors whilst whites saw it as a necessary ministry. To be consistent in this regard it became necessary for the churches to minister to both sides of the battle line and some churches took resolutions to this effect.

The reality, though is that the churches were never effectively able to implement or act on this resolution to minister to the soldiers of Umkhonto We Sizwe, Poqo and the Azanian Liberation Army, the military wings respectively of the ANC, PAC and the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania (BCMA).

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa was one denomination which made a bold attempt by placing Rev Moremi as chaplain to the Refugees in Dukwe, Botswana, in liaison with the Botswana Christian Council and the SACC.(76) Unfortunately his services were terminated by the Botswana Christian Council. An envisaged visit by the Rev F Chikane and the Rev Dr K E Mgojo to resolve this matter never materialized.(77) There is then no indication that any of the SACC related Churches succeeded in carrying out this special ministry although there is evidence that some of them did make enquiries in this regard.

On the other hand, the ANC's 1985 Consultative meeting resolved to set-up a Religious Desk with a Chaplaincy to minister to their members but, unfortunately, no ordained ministers were officially placed by the churches as Chaplains to the ANC. Instead the ANC depended on the clergy, ordinands or seminary students who were forced into exile, to minister to them, and in most instances they were not recognised, accredited or licenced by their churches.

Again, one would argue that this is evidence of the ideological entrapment of the SACC member churches, an hypotheses which is to be explored at a more analytical level in the next chapter.

3.9 CONCLUSION

A study of the SACC related churches for the period 1968-1974 shows a clear shift from their traditional concerns for freedom of worship and religious practice to a struggle to translate resolutions and statements to active engagement to deligitimize and eliminate apartheid. It shows also the ideological constraints the Church is subjected to as it struggles to address the problems confronting it.

The next chapter is in effect a continuation of this chapter but it takes another phase of this twenty year period which deals with the results of this struggle and the related dynamics.

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13. Apartheid and the Church, Sprocas Church Report (Johannesburg, 1972)
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19. De Gruchy, op. cit., p.129
20. Regehr, op. cit., p.241
21. See the SACC's Justice and Reconciliation Report of 1972.
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27. Randall, P. Towards Social Change. A Report of the Social Commission of SPROCAS, Publication No 6 (Johannesburg, 1971) p.1. See also Peter Randall's motivation paper (document) dated the 9th September 1971 entitled "Tentative proposals for a follow-up action programme to the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society" (CPSA Archives, University of the Witwatersrand), p.1
28. Ibid., p.1.

29. Comment by Dr Oscar Wollheim under signatories to the Report of SPROCAS Political Commission. SPROCAS Publication No 10 on South Africa's Political Alternatives (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1973).
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31. Randall, P. Anatomy of Apartheid. A publication of the Spro-cas, Occassional Publication Number 1 (Johannesburg, 1971), p.11
32. Eloff Commission Report, 1973, p62.
33. Randall, P. (1971) op.cit., p.8
34. Walshe, P. Church versus State in South Africa: The Case of the Christian Institute (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), p.92
35. B.A. Khoapa's paper, dated 30 September 1971, op.cit.
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40. Randall, P. South Africa's Political Alternatives, op. cit., p. 197.
41. Document on "Spro-cas 2, Black Community Programmes: Tentative suggestions for Action" by Ben A Khoapa, dated 30th September, 1971, CPSA Archives.
42. Randall, P. op. cit., pp. 203-204
43. Ibid., p. 239
44. Ibid., p. 241
45. Thomas, op. cit., pp. 36-37. Thomas defines "mechanical indigenisation" as the "assumption of control and staffing of churches planted by overseas agencies by local or indigenous people". According to this definition a mechanically indigenised church would be one which

- a) is no longer under the control of its original founding mission society or church outside the country, and
- b) has produced its own locally-born and trained leadership. See Thomas, pp. 6-8.

46. Rev. Seth Mokitimi was elected to the presidency of the CCSA in 1966. But as Thomas says, this was a gesture of tokenism rather than a recognition of the realities of the growing "black strength of the SACC". This period in any case falls outside the 1968-1988 period.

47. Quoted in Ibid., p.186,

48. See Thomas, op. cit., pp. 183-185

49. See Peter Walshe's Church versus State in South Africa op.cit., p.57.

50. Thomas, op.cit., p. 160

51. Walshe, P. op.cit., for this analysis

52. Randall, P. (ed) Not without Honour: Tribute to Beyers Naude, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982), pp. 43-44

53. The Trial of Beyers Naude: Christian Witness and the Rule of Law, edited by the International Commission of Jurists (london: Search Press, 1974, 1975), pp. 153-163
54. Ibid., p.159
55. Randall, P. (ed). Not Without Honour: Tribute to Beyers Naude. op. cit., p43. See also Randall's Taste of Power. p. 608.
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59. Ibid., p.9
60. See the Report of the General Secretary of the SACC to the 1974 National Conference entitled "The Church at the Crossroads", p.2
61. Minutes of the Annual meeting of the National Conference of the SACC held on July 31, August 1-2, 1974 at St Peters Conference Centre, Hammanskraal. CPSA archives.

62. Thomas, op. cit., p.192.
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65. Interview with Phillip Russell on the 19th February 1991 in Canberra, Australia.
66. Interview with David Thomas on 20th February, 1991, in Canberra Australia.
67. Wolfgang Kistner's letter of the 18th January 1978 to Dr K H de Jung in the Netherlands. See also the Eloff Commission p.105.
68. Ibid.
69. Interview with David Thomas, op.cit.,
70. Thomas, op. cit., pp. 192-19. See also Law, L, et al, "Conscientious Objection: The Church Against Apartheid's Violence", in Villa Vicencio, C, Theology and Violence: The South African debate, (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1987), p. 284

71. Thomas, op. cit., p.190.
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73. See the DRC Newsletter, No 135, July-August 1970. See also Mbali, op. cit., pp. 56-57.
74. Ibid., p.115.
75. Mbali, op. cit., p.57.
76. Minutes of the Department of Refugee Ministries of the 13 April 1987, MR87/113, SACC
77. Minutes MR 88/130 (4) of the Department of Refugee Ministries of 13 April 1987, MR87/113, SACC.

CHAPTER FOUR

ON THE OTHER SIDE: 1974-1988

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout the study of the ministry of the SACC from 1968-1988 I was interested in identifying a historical moment which could signify a turning point, a metanoia for the SACC and its member churches. In particular my concern was to determine whether or not it is possible to locate in one event the essential beginnings of a dynamic in the churches which may be regarded as culminating in the Standing for the Truth Campaign. My study shows that the debate on the Conscientious Objection resolution can be considered to be just such a significant, historical mark in the process of ideological shifts within the SACC. As David Thomas noted:

In place of its outright dissociation from the (PCR) grants, the SACC in time adopted a much softer stance in terms of which it stated that it fully supported the aims of the PCR and merely disagreed with some of the methods adopted by the programme to

effect those aims. It was not until 1974 that the full extent of the SACC's change of attitude towards not only the grants but to the liberation struggles being waged by exiled nationalist movements became apparent in the form of what was known as the "Conscientious Objection resolution" passed by the SACC National Conference of that year.(1)

Thomas, in discussing this resolution, noted that "the new standing of the SACC was indicative.....of its having finally thrown of liberal paternalism".(2) Thomas' definitive "finally" is too strong a way of stating this point. All indications are that the SACC was not totally free of all forms of liberal paternalism even then as I will demonstrate this in the following argument.

The 1975 National Conference of the SACC for instance treated the Conscientious Objection matter with caution. Bax's motion on "Conscientious Objection and strategies for the future" was opposed by the Conference. Instead Phillip Russell "proposed, and the conference resolved that the motion be treated as confidential and be dealt with by various divisions of the Council".(3) Similarly At the 1976 National Conference the war resister issue was only mentioned in passing.(4) When it was discussed, member churches of the SACC also treated this issue modestly and with caution.(5)

In my interviews with Joseph Wing (who was intimately involved with the ecumenical movement throughout this period) and Wolfgang Kistner (who has written extensively about the period of the seventies) both expressed disappointment that attempts to commit the SACC and its member churches to a constructive strategic programme of action and the working out of the implications of this resolution met with failure.

Joseph Wing's disappointment is related to his pacifist view. In the interview I had with him stated clearly that he supported the Conscientious Objection resolution because of his commitment to pacifism which he saw as being more compatible with the gospel. Although the resolution was not itself a strictly pacifist statement for him it was a breakthrough in advancing the pacifist view. He was thus disappointed that this matter was not taken further in 1975. He felt that those who opposed the resolution in 1974 or sounded caution in 1975 came from the British imperialist tradition which was steeped in imperial concepts of war.

Wolfgang Kistner's disappointment was based on the historical reality that there was a cautious handling

of the resolution in 1975. One of the reasons as stated by David Thomas in the last chapter was simply pressure from the state and the public. De Gruchy's comment in relation to this crisis faced by the churches is instructive. He says

The debate at Hammanskraal and in the ensuing months revealed that the churches, to say nothing of the public, were ill prepared for it. They had categorically rejected violence as a means either to prevent or to promote change, but they had not worked through the implications of the former. Now they were forced to do precisely this.(6)

De Gruchy continues to say that the churches had done very little thinking on conscientious objection prior to Hammanskraal nor had they given any attention to the actual current legislation on military service.(7)

In a further interview with David Thomas on the 20th February 1991 in Canberra, Australia, he agreed with Kistner and Wing that there was a resistance to follow-up with action on this resolution (Conscientious Objection) in 1975 and 1976 National Conferences of the SACC until after June, 16, 1976. But he argues that this, nevertheless, does not change the fact that the resolution signified an ideological turning point in the life of the SACC. He continues to hold that with leadership being more black, and under the impact of the black consciousness philosophy, there was an "ideological

rapture", a "breakthrough", which made it possible for the SACC to begin the journey of metanoia. This, he said, was the time when they "felt the weight of Black Power".

John Rees' title for the 1974 National Conference Report is indicative of the crucial circumstances which led to this ideological shift. The theme of the Conference was "Daring to live for Christ", and the Report was entitled "The Church at the Crossroads". This, he said, is where the churches at that stage in history were. In motivating his point he suggested that

Never before in the history of South Africa have eyes of so many been turned towards the Church in the seeking of a solution to the escalating problem confronting all population groups within South Africa...

For many commentators, and from speaking to the black group in South Africa, the future looks "Bad"....

Never before in the history of our country has the reality of possible violence been so close.....The possibility that violence will be inevitable; inevitable because of the intransigence of the white man, inevitable because the white man is not prepared to share, inevitable because the white man is too comfortable with what he has.(8)

He further emphatically believed that "it is in the Church with Jesus Christ as its Head that there are still possibilities of reconciliation in this situation". He used an analogy of a frog which was pursued by a snake to show how the Church is so petrified that it was unable to move. He said that

the Church goes through the motions and statements, that it does things, but it does not move. He concludes that

We are trapped by our very history. We are prisoners of what we have perpetrated and allowed to be perpetrated over such a long time.

.....In much of what we say and do in this country we have put our wills, our ideologies, above that of the Lord of Life, even Jesus Christ.

What we need, he argued is a bold and courageous leadership to take us out of this situation.

The resolution, therefore, still signifies a fundamental point at which the churches were jostled to struggle to make an ideological shift on the question of war and violence in the country and to also take seriously the reality of the position of the oppressed majority in South Africa. Thus what follows from the debate on this resolution shows that the SACC related churches began to take sides with the oppressed and also questioned the legitimacy of the South African government.

4.2 TAKING SIDES WITH THE VICTIMS OF APARTHEID

The preamble to the Conscientious Objection resolution acknowledges God as a God of liberation

for the oppressed, and sees the South African minority white regime as having "failed to fulfil its calling to be God's servant for good rather than for evil and for oppression". It recognises that true peace can be founded only on justice and that the Republic of South Africa is a "fundamentally unjust and discriminatory society", and implied that the defence thereof is excluded from the definition of a just war.

The preamble further maintained that "it is hypocritical to deplore the violence of terrorists or freedom fighters while we ourselves prepare to defend our society with its primary, institutionalized violence" which "provoked the counter-violence of the terrorists or freedom fighters, by means of yet more violence". It exposes the hypocrisy of claiming that God was on the side of the Afrikaners in their First and Second Wars of Independence whilst denying black people in South Africa the same today. The violence of the imperialism of the English also falls within this form of hypocrisy in relation to their attitude to the counter-violence of the oppressed.

Lastly, it questioned the one sidedness of the chaplaincy ministry of the churches which indicated

moral support for the defence of a fundamentally unjust and discriminatory society. The resolution then deplores all violence, identifies itself with the oppressed, and then calls upon the churches to consider whether they should not challenge their members to become conscientious objectors. It also calls on churches to seek ways of ministering to exiles and those who have taken arms against the apartheid system and are based on the other side of the borders of South Africa. Lastly it requested the SACC to study methods of non-violent action for change.

Although one discerns much tension within the debate on this resolution, the choice to identify with the oppressed, to take sides with justice, the commitment to consider methods of non-violent action to change this fundamentally unjust and discriminatory society, and the condemnation of the hypocrisy of whites in seeing a speck in their brothers' and sisters' eyes whilst having a log in their eyes, is all significant.

In his defence of this resolution, Bax tried to argue that the resolution did not "choose this side of the either/or" because it went on to state that the Conference deplores violence as a means of solving

problems.(9) But the fact is that the side taken by the resolution is not that of war or violence but that of justice, and taking sides with justice puts one on the side of the victims of the unjust system.

Second, the resolution not only suggests that Christians consider an act of defiance of the status quo, or passive resistance in obedience to God, but it also calls on the SACC to study methods of "non-violent action for change". During the debate on this resolution Douglas Bax noted that

...neither the churches nor the SACC had been in the lead of doing something practical to change the status quo in South Africa. (8)

Beyers Naude, the seconder to this resolution, declared in a sermon delivered after the Conference, that

As a Christian Community we are commanded by Christ, not only to identify ourselves with those in suffering and distress, but also to take active and positive steps to prevent as far as humanly possible such suffering..... We are called not only to be peacelovers but even more peacemakers.(9)

It is clear that there was a definite struggle here to move beyond statements of condemnation, to non-violent action to change the society. To this end the SACC intensified its ministry to victims of

the apartheid system and began applying its mind on the question of sanctions and disinvestments, the legitimacy of government, and effective non-violent action.

4.3 MINISTRY TO VICTIMS OF APARTHEID

If the Conscientious Objection resolution (1974) signified the beginning of the struggle for an ideological shift from support for the legitimacy of the violence of the powerful to the process of the deligitimization of this violence, the student revolt of 1976 can be regarded as the material turning point for the SACC related churches in South Africa.

The brutality of the apartheid regime against children who were protesting against an oppressive education system forced the churches to reorientate their position from that of neutrality to that of taking sides with the victims of apartheid. In a statement released by the SACC on 16 June 1976, the SACC declared that it was appalled at the authorities' total lack of understanding of the aspirations of blacks.

The fact that the confrontation involved school children has the frightening implication that black grievances are not only a matter of politics but have become a matter of intense and widespread agony, felt

even by children, which could escalate into a national catastrophe.(12)

As the revolt spread beyond Soweto into other townships in the Witwatersrand and as the death toll reached alarming proportions the SACC related Church leaders held an emergency meeting on the 18th June. Although there was a sense of helplessness and a "vast chasm which separated the white churchmen from their black brothers"(13), Church leaders agreed on a day of prayer and the establishment of an emergency fund (the Asingeni Relief Fund) to help victims of the violence.

The meaning of this word "Asingeni" is significant. It means "we do not enter", and was an expression of an act of solidarity with the school children who refused to enter classes to be fed with the Bantu Education which they felt was poison to them.

Whilst this fund was initially set up to give rapid assistance and relief to victims of 1976 in the form of funeral grants and legal costs, by 1979 the fund had taken a new direction. As the Asingeni Report No 19, July-December 1979, states:

....our mandate tacitly involved assisting the victims of the apartheid system and to

empower the powerless in their liberation struggle against totally unjust and immoral system prevalent in our country. We are now making this tacit commitment more explicit in the assistance that we have been called upon more and more to provide.

The new direction taken by the Fund involved support and campaigning for victims of forced removals and resettlements, support for labour struggles, and support for Black Consciousness groups. Moreover the SACC recognised the importance of trade unions as a force for peaceful change. Thus the Asingeni Report No 25, November 1982, accepts that "the trade union movement is the cutting edge of the liberation struggle for a more just and democratic non-racial South Africa".

The shift from mere assistance and relief for victims of the violence of apartheid, to an empowerment of the powerless in their struggle against the apartheid system, signified a definite act of taking sides. The crisis of 1976 was so serious that the Churches could not avoid taking this option.

As Colleen Ryan puts it, "the Soweto uprisings marked a watershed in the country's history and touched almost every facet of South African life, not least

the churches".(14) John de Gruchy took the same view in saying that "few people, if any, will deny that Soweto is a powerful symbol in the contemporary history of South Africa". He continues to say that, "as such, it is important for the understanding of the struggle of the church".(15) The response of SACC related churches was to place the blame squarely on the doors of this system of apartheid and its violent security apparatus, regarding it as the cause of the revolt and the security forces as responsible for the escalation of violence.(16)

But for the Black community the actions taken were not enough, notes Colleen Ryan. She records that increasingly Christians were being challenged to do more than issue statements calling for peace.

In the next decade, as black ministers took the lead in the South African Council of Churches and in many of the member churches, they would, by their words and deeds, identify themselves closely with the liberation struggle. However, most white Christians whose neat suburban lives were far removed from the daily horror of township violence, could not understand why their churches became embroiled in "politics" and recoiled in alarm.(17)

Similarly during the uprising Beyers Naude is quoted as having said to those who were confused that,

whether we like it or not we have to take a decision. Either we have to side with blacks in their struggle for liberation or otherwise we are going to become irrelevant.(18)

Another programme, which was intensified because of the June 16 crisis, is the Dependants Conference (DC) which takes care of political prisoners and detainees, particularly their dependants. This programme was initiated as another way of acting in solidarity with the victims of apartheid. But the government, as expected, saw these ministries as disruptive because, as speakers said in parliament, the ministries gave the families of victims "comfort".(19) Later during the crisis of 1984-1986 (State of Emergency) the SACC established another fund called the National Emergency Fund (NEF). At about the same time the SACC began a sanctuary programme for young people who were haunted and tortured by the security forces of the apartheid regime.

But to return to the crisis of 1976, the pressure on the churches to take sides with justice against an unjust apartheid system compelled them to consider seriously what it means to take sides with the victims of apartheid. Thus the theme of the 1976

National Conference of the SACC was "Liberation", with a focus on political rights of blacks, full citizenship in a common state; and the consideration of disinvestment to which the churches were at that point still opposed to.(20) The very choice of this theme indicates a shift from simple strategies of survival to strategies of liberation.

It is not suprising therefore that the SACC related churches began to grapple with questions such as the legitimacy of the apartheid system, disinvestments, sanctions, and active resistance against the apartheid regime. The areas of struggle characterize a liberation mode as opposed to strategies of assisting the oppressed to survive.

For the purposes of this study, and in order to highlight its central theme, I will focus on one of these questions, namely, that of the legitimacy of government, although the discourse will touch on the other matters. In doing so I will seek to argue that the question of legitimacy of government determine to a great extent the ideological positions and practice of the Church.

4.4 THE LEGITIMACY OF GOVERNMENT

The events of the early seventies raised the question of the legitimacy of Government in a very indirect way. The impact of the Christian Institute (which acted as a catalyst in the development of the concept of Christian resistance in South Africa), the emergence of the black consciousness movement; and, the birth of a powerful trade union movement led by blacks, represented what Cochrane describes as a "determined programme of action and public persuasion certain in the long run to threaten the legitimacy of much of apartheid policy and practice".(21)

Cochrane further suggests that

Throughout this time, however, the churches were at pains to stress their acceptance of the legitimacy of the governing authority, and their willingness, albeit under protest, to keep within the limits of debate and action set by the regime.(22)

Only fringe groups such as the Christian Institute began to act as if there were a case for the legitimacy of the liberation struggle of the oppressed, rather than merely verbally to address that case. Challenges to the legality of government policy (under the rubric of the rule of law), and a

change in the concept of resistance from identification with suffering to solidarity with the struggle, marked this time.(23)

The legitimacy question within the SACC was raised via the work of the Justice and Reconciliation. Although the Division of Justice and Reconciliation focussed initially on the theological justification for not only combatting racism but for changing the power structure of the social order (24), its later focus became that of human rights and violence, especially with the coming of Wolfram Kistner to the SACC.

In his paper entitled "The Human Rights issue in South Africa", Kistner examines the different concepts of human rights and raises a question as to how the SACC and its member churches can contribute towards a new order which will safeguard all members of the South African society against human rights violation (25), particularly the right to self-determination.(26) It is through this struggle for human rights that Kistner leads the SACC to the question of legitimacy of laws or of political measures passed by the apartheid regime.

In his paper "Conscience in Conflict", dealing with views on war, violence and non-violence in South Africa, Kistner critically evaluates the declaration of South Africa as a "fundamentally unjust society" in the Conscientious Objection Resolution of 1974. He argues that "a finding to this effect presupposes a criterion which makes it possible to judge what constitutes a fundamentally just or a fundamentally unjust society". Kistner continues to say that

The criterion to which we refer is generally known as the concept of human rights...which conforms with generally accepted ethical norms and which can be used to test the legitimacy of laws or of political measures, passed by the government.(27)

In July of 1977 the discussion moved beyond the mere declaration of the South African political system as fundamentally unjust, and suggested a way of resisting it through conscientious objection and through disinvestment. In respect of the latter, a memorandum was presented to the 1977 National Conference on foreign investments in South Africa suggesting the withholding of economic support and refusal to cooperate with the system of apartheid as a way of "contributing towards change".

The discussion on the question of investment or disinvestment was understood as "an effort to find criteria for responsible participation or withdrawal from the South African economy with a view to ensuring that fundamental human rights be recognised and accorded to all members of South African society".(28) But it was only at the 1978 National Conference of the SACC that a "series of resolutions and pronouncements on principles to guide investments and loans in South Africa" were adopted because South African investments and loans were made within "the context of a political and economic order that is considered by the churches to be fundamentally unjust".(29)

Another way in which the churches came close to the question of legitimacy was through the declaration of apartheid as sin, and the theological justification thereof as a heresy, in 1982. The implications of declaring apartheid a heresy, first, was that apartheid was thereby delegitimized, although there is no indication that the SACC Churches which took this action understood the implication thereof. Charles Villa-Vicencio depicts the dilemma in which they were confronted by the debate of the Kairos

Document on the legitimacy of government.

He says that:

Despite having declared apartheid a sin and its theological justification a heresy, the churches refuse to regard the government responsible for this sinful state as theologically illegitimate.(30)

In a statement made by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) at its 1977 Sixth Assembly, the Assembly asserted that a recognition that the situation in South Africa constituted a status confessionis, because of perverted and oppressive apartheid systems, meant that churches would "publicly and unequivocally reject" the system.(31)

Second, the system was not only delegitimized, condemned and rejected, but such a stand implied that Christians have an obligation actively to resist it.

Further to the initial debates, the 1987 Conference of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, in a resolution on legitimacy of the government clearly extrapolated the heresy question to include the question of legitimacy. It reads as follows:

The Conference in implementing its pronouncements on Apartheid as a heresy, calls into question the moral legitimacy of

the South African regime as a basis for questioning the de jure legitimacy of that regime; therefore, recommends that its members question their moral obligation to obey unjust laws....(32)

A more direct debate on the legitimacy question, therefore, came only during the eighties as one can see from the resolution of the Methodist Conference above. Interestingly Phillip Russell indicates that the question of legitimacy of government never arose during their debates of the early seventies involving the PCR and the Conscientious Objection resolution. He believes that black participation raised, or put into the agenda of the Council, the legitimacy issue. This, he said, was part of the enriching effect of increasing black participation in the Council which introduced new dimensions of thought and greater clarity on the political problem of South Africa and the mission of the Church in that situation.(33) This position concurs with Cochrane's periodized typology of Christian resistance to apartheid which, he says, characterises the period 1977-1983 as a period when the "legality of the government" was challenged".(34)

The debate on legitimacy really comes to a head in three moments of ecclesial discourse, namely, the publication of the Kairos Document, the debate on the call to Prayer for the End of Unjust Rule, and the

adoption of the "Lusaka Statement".

The Kairos Document was published in September 1985 at the height of the crisis of the eighties. The Kairos Document approaches the legitimacy question via the traditional concept of tyranny, according to which it claims that:

once it is established beyond doubt that a particular ruler is a tyrant or that a particular regime is tyrannical, it forfeits the moral right to govern and the people acquire the right to resist and to....protect [themselves]...against injustice and oppression.(35)

"In other words", the Document continues, "a tyrannical regime has no moral legitimacy".

According to this tradition, a government may be the de facto government, but if it is a tyrannical regime "it is, from a moral and a theological point of view, illegitimate".(36)

The implications of declaring a government illegitimate, according to the Kairos Document, are as follows amongst others:

- i) The Church does not only pray for the said government but should also work for its replacement

- ii) the Church may have to engage in acts of civil disobedience. (37)

The call to Prayer for the End of Unjust Rule in June 16, 1986 was one example of an open and direct challenge to the legitimacy of the South African regime and, as a result, it triggered enormous controversy within member churches of the SACC. The Theological Rationale published in support of this call asserted that "we have prayed" for the government to change its politics but now

we pray that God will replace the present structures of oppression with ones that are just, and remove from power those who persist in defying His laws, in-stalling in their place leaders who will govern with justice and mercy.(38)

The "Lusaka Statement" which was drawn up in 1987 by the Consultation of the World Council of Churches on the crisis in Southern Africa held in Lusaka, was more explicit in declaring the South African regime illegitimate. After analysing the seriousness of the political crisis in South Africa and Namibia and having affirmed that "civic authority is instituted of God to do good" and that under this "biblical imperative all people are obliged to do justice and

show special care for the oppressed and the poor" the Consultation resolved that this situation left them with "no alternative but to conclude that the South African regime and its colonial domination of Namibia is illegitimate".(39)

Following this consultation and on the basis of a report presented to the 1987 National Conference of the SACC, the Conference adopted the following resolution:

The National Conference takes note of Church pronouncements on Apartheid as a Heresy which put in question the moral legitimacy of the South African regime as a basis for questioning the de jure Legitimacy of that regime. Therefore, recommends to the Member Churches to question their moral obligation to obey unjust laws such as:

The Population Registration Act
The Group Areas Act
The Land Acts
The Education Acts
The Separate Amenities Acts.

Further calls upon Member Churches to support the

structures which are recognised by the people as their authentic legitimate authority in the eyes of God.(40)

This resolution was the most direct decision to deligitimize the government and to suggest acts of disobedience on the basis of the illegitimacy of government.

The resolution of the SACC at its 1987 National Conference led to the Harare International Conference on the Legitimacy of the Government from a moral and legal perspective, held in September 1989. The Harare Conference was mainly a Conference between Churches in South Africa and their regional and international partners. Experts in various disciplines impacting on this matter were invited to assist the Churches in this regard. Unfortunately the report of this conference was not yet published at the completion of this study, but its conclusions affirmed the position held by South African churches.

(41)

Once the question of the legitimacy of government was settled the debate on violence either became sterile or was now seen from a completely different perspective. Sanctions and disinvestments for instance were regarded as legitimate non-violent ways of ending apartheid. Thus a commitment to effective non-violent action was adopted by churches present, at the 1988 Convocation of Churches, to force the regime to abandon apartheid and negotiate a new non-racial democratic society in South Africa. To give effect to this decision, the "Standing for the

Truth Campaign" was launched to mobilize both Christians and all the people of South Africa to refuse to cooperate or collaborate with the apartheid system. A call was made, in obedience to God, to defy apartheid laws and structures.

It is clear that the struggle for the legitimacy of the cause of the victims of the apartheid system climaxed at the Convocation of Churches in 1988. As the information booklet on the Standing for the Truth Campaign notes

The year 1988 was a turning point in the life of the church. It was a year when the church moved forward from just condemning apartheid to a commitment of effective non-violent action to end apartheid. It was a year when the churches stopped debating about violence and non-violence and chose to rather act non-violently to end this evil apartheid system thus making violence unnecessary. (42)

4.5

CONCLUSION

The study of the period 1968-1988 in the life of the SACC and its member churches shows that there was an intensive struggle to move from theory to praxis. The struggle was not a result of some theoretical presupposition but was thrust on the Church as a result of the social crisis the Church was confronted with throughout this period.

At the beginning of Chapter three I outlined briefly the socio-political crisis of the sixties which led to a new phase in the life of the SACC and its member churches signalled particularly by the publication of the "Message to the People of South Africa". I discussed how the Churches responded to this crisis and how the world ecumenical movement enriched this struggle of the churches as they entered this new phase of translating theory into practice.

I then identified, in the cause of this struggle, what I called a significant, historical mark in the process of ideological shifts within the life of the SACC, as the debate and adoption of the Conscientious Objection resolution of 1974. I outlined as well the socio-political crisis which confronted the churches at that time. This crisis intensified during the latter part of the seventies following the students uprising in 1976. Increased State repression followed and many organisations, and a black newspaper were banned in October 1977.(43) Later, when Mr P W Botha became a Prime Minister in 1978, the concept of a "total strategy" to deal with what white South Africa perceived as a "total

communist onslaught" against the country was developed.(44)

This political crisis during the seventies and early eighties was matched by a deeper crisis at the economic level. During the second half of the nineteen seventies, following the boom of the sixties, South Africa experienced the worst recession and depression since the nineteen thirties because of the structural contradiction within an apartheid economic system. This crisis was deepened by the undermining of capital's ability to resist pressures caused by growing inflation, shortage of skilled labour (because of the exclusion of blacks from gaining such skills) and, the balance of payment deficits.

The socio-political crisis together with the related economic crisis as outlined above deepened this crisis further into what Saul and Gelb call an "organic crisis" in the eighties.(45) This socio-political and economic crisis had an enormous impact on the Church in South Africa particularly the SACC related churches as I have shown throughout the study of the practice of these churches for the years 1968-1988. This moved the SACC beyond

statements of condemnation of apartheid to action to end it. As we have shown, the SACC began to take sides overtly with the victims of apartheid and acted in solidarity with them by supporting conscientious objectors, attempting to extend their ministry of chaplaincy to the liberation movements, calling for disinvestments and sanctions and engaging in active resistance against the apartheid regime including civil disobedience.

The question of the legitimacy of the government was thus bound to arise as all these actions could only be considered in relation to whether or not, amongst others, the government in power was legitimate. I shall return to this question of legitimacy and its implications in Chapter six of this study to show how it affects the practice of the Church in relation to its mission in South Africa.

Having completed what I set out to do in Chapter three and four, that is, to look at some specific paradigmatic events which are pertinent to this study, and having analysed them and contrasted them, I will now proceed to look at critical themes which emerged from this study and I will end with a critical theological reflection in Chapter six.

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PART THREE

ASSESSMENT OF THE PRACTICE AND THEOLOGY OF THE

SACC AND ITS RELATED CHURCHES

1968-1988

CHAPTER 5

CRITICAL THEMES WHICH EMERGED FROM THE STUDY OF THE PERIOD

1968-1988

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last two chapters I have discussed specific historical moments in the history of the Church in South Africa, for the two decades starting from 1968, which in my opinion are critical for the understanding of the practice of the Church in relation to mission in a crisis situation. I have dealt briefly with "The Message to the People of South Africa"; SPROCAS I and II; The Programme to Combat Racism and its impact on South African churches; the Conscientious Objection Resolution; the Challenge of Black Consciousness; Black Theology; the Christian Institute; and the events of 1976 and after. In each case, I have isolated only specific features of these "historical moments" for the specific purpose of unraveling contradictions in the Churches' understanding of mission in relation to particular crises. I have tried to show that the post-1976 period suggests that the SACC related churches made an option for the poor and oppressed as opposed to their earlier position, which consciously or unconsciously legitimated the apartheid system.

In this Chapter I shall reflect on some of the critical themes which emerged throughout this 20 years of struggle to translate theory into practice, a struggle to move from a theological interpretation of reality to a theology of the transformation of that reality. These themes include the concept of mission of the churches related to the SACC; the issue of "neutrality" as opposed to the choice to "take sides"; contradictions in the violence debate; and the choice of developmental strategies of intervention as opposed to strategies of liberation. The aim is to expose the inherent contradictions in these concepts and thereby uncover the hidden theological interests undergirding them. This analysis should facilitate the development of a critical theological theory and practice of the Church which I will deal with thereafter.

5.2 TRANSLATING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

The so-called multi-racial churches in South Africa condemned and opposed racism and apartheid throughout their history through resolutions and statements. De Gruchy, for instance, states that "in spite of failures in their own fellowship, the English speaking churches spoke out strongly against what was happening at virtually every step along the apartheid route during the first decade of National Party rule".(1)

What these churches did not do was to translate statements of

condemnation and protest into action. Trevor Huddleston said of these churches that there could be no doubt or question about the power of their witness on racial issues. He describes how he participated in the "framing and speaking to resolutions of Synod which condemned apartheid or which urged advance in opening up opportunities for Africans or which called upon the government to redress obvious injustices". But "it was only as the years slipped by", that he "began to wonder whether in fact it meant" that this would prevail to break down the hideous barriers.(2) Regehr puts this more succinctly.

There has been no shortage of ringing declarations to condemn apartheid and all that it entails, but direct action and even practices and customs within these churches have frequently fallen short of the rhetoric.(3)

In a study of methods of mission John Carter asserts that "pronouncements are not enough; the social order must be changed".(4) Cochrane notes that, further along, Carter uses "Characteristic verbs of public pronouncements and resolutions", such as "we criticise....we deplore..."we find it tragic....we regret....we declare....we are concerned...", to emphasis the "failure of the churches to move beyond the point of statements to doing something independently about the conditions they criticise.(5)

Villa-Vicencio discusses this matter in detail in his book Trapped in Apartheid where he claims that "what has dogged the English-speaking churches most has been their inability to translate their noblest theological declarations and ethical ideals into practice". (6)

It was only after the "Message", and the PCR and its Special Fund, that contradictions within the apartheid society were sharpened to such an extent that the churches were left with no option but to address them.

As early as 1969 the SACC made a call to Churches to respond more adequately to the challenges of the time. This followed a lengthy discussion on the role of the Council and the participation of the Churches in ecumenical action. The resolution of the conference read as follows:

The first National Conference of the South African Council of Churches is convinced that the Christian Church in South Africa is not responding adequately to the challenges of modern society. It urgently calls upon the Churches to acknowledge their depending upon each other in mission to participate more meaningfully in the work of the South African Council of Churches, and to provide more adequate resources of finance and manpower for ecumenical ventures in Christian mission.(7)

Whilst discussing "The Message to the People of South Africa", earlier in the same meeting, the National Conference directed the General Secretary to form a Commission immediately "to discover, for the guidance of the Churches a strategy for procuring change in South African society".(8)

The concrete historical realities of the time created the conditions necessary for the churches to recognise the hidden hypocrisy of their stand, leading to a critical analysis of this reality. The churches were faced with a crisis and they had to take decisive action to get involved in society to try and change it.

The evidence suggests that there are two ways in which the churches tried to change the South African society: (i) by changing the attitudes of South Africans, particularly whites, and, (ii) by engaging in development programmes;

The first falls within the churches understanding of the concept of mission which I shall discuss below, while the second issue will be dealt with separately. In the process I shall raise the questions of neutrality and violence, the major problems which faced the churches in their attempt to translate theory into action in the last two decades up to 1988.

5.2.1 Mission concept

The churches saw their mission during the period discussed as that of changing the attitudes of South Africans, particularly whites. The ultimate goal

here was good race-relations and reconciliation between blacks and whites. To undertake this mission, the SACC itself established the Division of Justice and Reconciliation in 1971, whilst the Anglicans formed the "Human Relations and Reconciliation Programme". Various other churches took similar actions.

The emphasis was thus clearly on reconciliation, but as early as 1972 the SACC, in a "Report to Congregations", concluded that it was "naive and utopian to believe that there can be good relations, neighbourliness and reconciliation between the various races and peoples of South Africa, as long as basic injustices remains". The statement emphasized that there could be no reconciliation which avoided the "costly way of justice, repentance and forgiveness".(9)

Whilst these efforts to work for good race-relations were challenging, they did not achieve the set goals. For example, in 1979 the Human Relations and Reconciliation Programme presented a report to the Executive Committee of the Anglican Church which indicates the failure of this programme.(10) In

this report they said that "the state of the church vis-a-vis racial alienation and conflict in Southern Africa remains perilous". The Programme, they said in the Report, has "run out of steam", and consequently they called on the Church once more to re-examine its life in the light of:

- i) the WCC Programme to Combat Racism.
- ii) the 1972 Sprocas report on Apartheid and the Church;
- iii) the 1974 All Africa Conference of Churches Assembly.

The recommendation of the report that the Anglican Church should re-examine itself in the light of these three crucial events contains within it the clear implication of a need to re-examine the question of taking sides with the victims of apartheid, and to identify with their struggles in so far as this was compatible with the gospel. In fact, the report drew the Anglican Church back to the very issues which the churches had tried to avoid by engaging in alternative means of addressing the crisis as a way of shunning the direct challenge of the PCR's Special Fund.

The Justice and Reconciliation programme of the SACC was confronted with the same crisis as the Anglicans and made a significant shift from a shallow understanding of

reconciliation without justice. This is evidenced by its later emphasis on human rights, campaigns against forced removals, action on disinvestment and sanctions, on labour issues, the legitimacy of government, and others. This shift was noted by the Eloff Commission (1982) which saw the Division as revolutionary. It described Dr W Kistner, the director of this Division, then, as the ideologue of this development. Indeed, Kistner was found by the Commission to be "responsible for the planning of many of the strategies of resistance" of the SACC.(11)

One organisation which engaged in extensive programmes to try to change the attitudes of whites during the sixties and early seventies was the Christian Institute. In cooperation with the SACC the Christian Institute spearheaded a programme called the the White Community Programmes (WCP) within SPROCAS II led by former student leaders called Horst Kleinschmidt and Neville Curtis. The aim of the programme was to help whites to be conscious of their racist attitudes, to help them change these attitudes and to work for a redistribution of power in South Africa.(12) This was not done just because of the challenge by the black consciousness, that the primary task of whites was towards their own people, but it was also based on the assumption of SPROCAS I commission reports that "whites and white institutions would be prepared to make the necessary adjustments".(13)

Although several significant projects (like Bible Study groups, a campaign to highlight poor living conditions among black workers, a campaign against the destructive effects of apartheid on black family life, the establishment of a family life office, and the Programme for Social Change (PSC)), were pursued vigorously there was apathy amongst whites and the results were generally disappointing. As a result the programme was disbanded by mid-1975. Archbishop Denis Hurley, (who was a prominent member of the CI) disappointed by the ending of SPROCAS II even before the PSC was disbanded in 1975, launched Diakonia in 1974 in cooperation with the Natal Council of Churches. Diakonia was an inter-denominational pastoral institute designed essentially to continue with the "dual thrust" of SPROCAS II's white and black programmes.(14) But this "dual thrust" was discontinued twelve years later in 1986. Diakonia's motivation was that it was time now to shift focus away from a specifically white programme to issue related programmes towards a non-racial South Africa. The activities of the "White Development Programme were thus converted into issues to be dealt with by the new Social Action Network following an evaluation of the work of Diakonia.(15) Seemingly the most successful of these white programmes was the End Conscription Campaign (E.C.C) which was a typical white problem.

Walshe observed, about this inevitable end of the WCP, that

As the Christian Institute suspected, even as the programme was launched, there was insufficient yeast - no critical mass. Certainly the dough did not rise, despite the efforts of a few brave individuals. (16)

The SPROCAS II proposal had anticipated the odds against this programme, that it would be more difficult for whites since in many spheres of concern of this programme their "perceived interests" were "directly in contradiction" to the programme's "ethical principles".(17)

From the critique of the 1979 Human Relations and Reconciliation Programme report, and from the shift in emphasis of the Division of Justice and Reconciliation and the failure of the WCP, it is clear that the programmes as originally conceived were not sufficiently effective to provide an alternative to the WCC Programme to Combat Racism.

The observation one needs to make here is on the mission concept of these churches. From their approach it seems that they expected the perpetrators of the apartheid system and its beneficiaries to respond, en masse, or at least in the centres of power, to the call to repentance. They assumed that those who heard the word would repent. They made the classically naive evangelical conceptual mistake of seeing the gospel only as "good news" without realising that the good news to some could be a message of doom or of judgement to others.

As the Kairos Document says, the kairos, the moment of truth may on the one hand be a moment of grace, blessings or salvation. On the other hand it may be a moment of judgement. It is an opportunity for one to make choices and to take decisive action.(18) The freedom to make choices, the principle of free-will, gives no guarantee that all those who hear the word will respond positively.

The claim here is that the churches failed to take seriously the sin of apartheid in this sense, that they failed to recognise deeper ideological and economic interests underneath the racist cover of the apartheid system. (19) They failed, or at least were not prepared, to accept that the good news of the gospel for racist South Africans may not in the first place be salvation, but judgement and punishment for those who are not prepared to respond positively by turning away from racism and its practices.

This claim will be defended by further reference to the way in which the churches responded to the question of development, neutrality and violence.

5.2.2 **Development: Survival Strategies and Strategies of Liberation**

The second way in which the churches chose to try to change South Africa was through development programmes. The intention here was to mobilize resources for the development of the black community, including education, aid and relief, and humanitarian programmes.

Three criticisms may be made about these development programmes. First, there is no indication that a critique of the concept and theory of development was made, nor is there much evidence that South African Churches were aware of the developments elsewhere in the world, regarding the whole debate on "development" and "underdevelopment". The churches did not seem to be aware of the then decade-old debate in Latin America which led to a shift from concepts of development to those of liberation. At least I have not found any indication in SACC archives that their life and practice was affected by the said developments.(20)

The exception here seems to be the Christian Institute again. Walshe shows that when the CI was confronted by what it perceived as an "impending civil war" in South Africa in

1971-72 period the CI and staff of SPROCAS II began to draw more consciously from European political theology, Latin American liberation theology and interacted with Black theologians in South Africa. Pro Veritate began to pay more attention to injustice in the Third World and created links with an international network in Europe and North America. Walshe also shows that there was an attempt to use the basic communities model which was used in Latin America although without success.(21)

These efforts by the Christian Institute and staff of SPROCAS indicates a level of consciousness about the Latin American struggles which also involved a critique of development theories in relation to liberation. Of significance here is that although the SACC co-sponsored SPROCAS II with the CI there were "signs" that the Council, under its General Secretary, John Rees, was apprehensive at the radical trend now being set. And financial support from member churches also "stagnated at a very disappointing level".(22) This slowing down of the member churches might be responsible for the lack of Consciousness about Latin American developments because of the distance between them and the CI which was grappling with these matters at that time. The closest to the Latin American approach is the use of Paulo Freire method of Conscientization particularly by the B.C.P. and the SACC to some extent during the later part of the seventies, because of the impact of the B.C.P. work on the SACC.

Second, although the development and relief programmes were necessary to alleviate the suffering of the black majority, and although many projects did make the black community more conscious of its own resources and led to a greater political awareness and activity, these programmes in the main were pre-occupied with survival strategies. They helped blacks to survive in the face of a brutal, violent and vicious apartheid system.

For example, a careful analysis of the whole programme of mobilization of resources for Black development during this period shows that it did not include direct political organisation of the black community for liberation. The Christian Institute and Sprocas II are exceptions in this regard.(23).

In the meantime, and in contrast to these programmes of development by South African Churches, the WCC had moved beyond strategies of survival to those of liberation. At the Addis Ababa Central Committee meeting in 1971, where the Special Fund of the PCR was discussed, the WCC declared that:

The proceeds for the Fund shall be used to support organisations that combat racism rather than welfare organisations that alleviate the effects of racism and which would normally be eligible for support from other units of the WCC.(24)

The differentiation between the Special Fund of the Programme to Combat Racism and normal support provided by other units of the WCC indicates a conscious and clear understanding in the WCC of the two respective trajectories of developmental survival strategies and liberation.

At Canterbury in 1969, the Central Committee had already called on the churches

to move beyond charity, grants and traditional programming to relevant and sacrificial action leading to new relationships of dignity and justice among all men and to become agents for the radical reconstruction of society.(25)

It is clear from this statement that the WCC had made an explicit distinction between support for organisations which are engaged in combating racism actively, and support purely for welfare purposes. The intention of the WCC here was clearly that of contributing to the process of liberation.(26).

It is in this context that one may say that the churches in South Africa were primarily involved in programmes for survival rather than for liberation: they did not differentiate between strategies of survival and those of liberation. Or if they did, they chose the former rather than the latter.

5.2.3 Conclusion

This preliminary critique of the understanding of mission of the churches during this period and their understanding of development shows that the churches understanding of these concepts was too limited and uncritical. In this sense, their theological position could not effectively assist the churches to move from theory (or statements) to practice (or action) to transform the South African society. In the next Chapter I shall reflect on these concepts to develop a basis for a more critical approach into mission and service.

5.3 THE QUESTION OF NEUTRALITY: AN IDEOLOGICAL POSITION

As I have claimed the decision of the WCC to establish the PCR and its related Special Fund was a clear indication that they had taken sides in Southern Africa and elsewhere in the world with the victims of racism. Because of this stand, the WCC was subjected to heavy criticism by South African churches. They argued that by taking sides, they had lost their neutrality, thus negating the mission of the Church for reconciliation. They called for neutrality as a virtuous tradition of the Church.

"Despite growing criticism", says, Mbali, "it became clear that for the churches to remain neutral could be interpreted as condoning the evil of racism", and on this basis "the WCC felt compelled to support the grants".(27) This position indeed moved from the traditional mission understanding of neutrality to that of taking sides with the victims of society or with the course of justice. Thus in the Addis Ababa resolution the Central Committee of the WCC proclaimed that "the churches must always stand for the liberation of the oppressed and victims of violent measures which deny basic human rights".(28)

The crisis which gradually developed in the programmes of the South African churches was that they were trying to assist blacks on the one hand and to convert whites on the other without taking sides with the course of justice. Villa-Vicencio deals with this matter in detail and argues that the inability of the English speaking churches "to translate their noblest theological declarations and ethical ideals into practice" is "solidly grounded in an obligation to minister to both black and white members in a society which separates these two groups by law and social practice". He continues to say that

refusing to take sides in the inevitable conflict generated by this division, these churches find themselves locked into moderation and caution. They are given to "nothing harsh or rigorous" in either their theological identity or in their social allegiance. From this has come a broad tolerance of diversity within these churches, the calculated use of ambiguity to ensure maximum unity in matters of theology and church policy, compromise in areas of political difference, and the shepherding of all along the via media, suitably backed by socio-political expediency and theological incentive.(29)

This is not unlike the problem of the white Dutch Reformed Church, which, on the question of the eucharist and black participation, could not comply with the demands of the Gospel because of the "weakness of some". But the dilemma of the English speaking churches is more complex compared to that of the DRC as the problem here is that of maintaining the tension between the interests of whites and those of blacks. As would be expected the interests of the dominant class weighed against those of the victims of apartheid. The claim therefore is that neutrality in the face of injustice can be interpreted as either taking sides with evil or condoning it, as Mbali has said earlier.(30)

The tension created by the ambiguous position of trying to be neutral in the face of injustice negated the mission of the churches rather than advanced it. One cannot choose to act against evil and still be neutral between evil and good. The Kairos Document put this succinctly it:

Nowhere in the Bible or in Christian tradition has it ever been suggested that we ought to try to reconcile good and evil, God and the devil. We are supposed to do away with evil, injustice, oppression and sin - not come to terms with it.(31)

It is interesting to contrast the debate on neutrality around the PCR grants and the debate concerning the Conscientious Objection resolution. In the debate on the Conscientious Objection resolution, some delegates at the SACC National Conference opposed the resolution on the grounds that it would make it difficult for citizens to do their normal duties in defence of the country. On the other hand, the SACC related churches vehemently opposed the PCR grants because thereby the WCC was supporting the violent overthrow of the government of the country.

The reference to the defence of the country appears to be a straightforward statement, but in an apartheid society, "citizens" meant whites and the defence of the country meant the defence of the apartheid regime against the legitimate demands of the black majority. Military defence of apartheid here acquires the status of a "normal" duty whilst armed resistance of the system of apartheid is regarded as support for violence and therefore unacceptable.

A comparison of these two debates show that neutrality was demanded only when the victims of society take arms to end their oppression whilst an engagement with the armed forces of the oppressive regime did not require neutrality.

Rob Robertson, a leading exponent of the "Third Way" approach which tends to emphasize neutrality between warring parties, takes a much more critical view of the concept of "neutrality" in his critique of the Kairos Document. He says

I agree that we dodge the responsibility of taking sides by trying to be a neutral intermediary, a reconciling influence, and that we pose as non-violent by condemning the "violence of both sides" without realising that the churches have hardly urged young white men to refuse the violence of military service.....But there is a non-violence that takes sides.(32)

Balcomb, in his study of "Third Way" theologies, observes that in the Third Way concept there is a deep seated fear of power arrangements, alignments, with one group or another or "ideologies" embedded within the fabric of society. There is fear of the gospel being compromised. He then concludes that

Third Way" theologians inevitably seek some way to "transcend, negate, escape, neutralise, resolve, encounter or mediate this dynamic". His thesis is that they appear to see this position as being "exempt from the ideological influences of the power alignments in society". In their view this non-aligned position represents "critical objectivity.(33)

The hypotheses which I seek to establish is not only that "Third Way" theologians believe that they are exempt from "ideological influences of the power alignments in society", but that this very position is an ideological stance.

5.4 THE NON-VIOLENCE DEBATE: A CONTRADICTION

5.4.1 The PCR Special Fund and the Conscientious Objection Resolution

As noted before, when the PCR's Special Fund was debated the South African churches objected to it because, they said, it supported violence. They gave the impression that they held a principled position of non-violence, and as de Gruchy puts it,

Though none of them stood in the pacifist tradition, they unanimously committed themselves, and eventually their churches, to a non-violent stance with regard to defending and to attacking apartheid.(34)

But none of these churches stood within a pacifist tradition. In an attempt to carry out the decision of the churches of principled non-violence to its logical conclusion, the Conscientious Objection resolution was adopted in 1974. The resolution called on member churches to consider supporting their members who withdrew from participation in conscription to an army which in the main was geared to defend the apartheid system. It also considered balancing the position of chaplaincy to the SADF by ministering to the communicants in arms with the liberation movements who have sought refuge in our neighbouring countries as well. But when the resolution was tabled the same delegates who opposed the PCR Special Fund (because it supported violence) objected to this resolution, now because it would stop citizens from defending their country.

A recent event which illuminates this contradiction even more dramatically is the "peace church debate" within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). As this debate has not yet been properly documented some background is necessary for the sake of clarity.

5.4.2 **The Methodist Peace Church Debate: A Classical Example**

In 1982 the Methodist Church called on Methodists to "inform themselves of the consequences of increasing militarism both in South Africa and the rest of the world". To this end the Conference asked the Christian Citizenship War and Peace Committee, a Working Group of the Christian Citizen Department (CCD), to prepare a creative education programme for peace. Following this decision six Bible Studies were prepared to enable local churches to discover what the scriptures and the Church say about the questions of violence and war and to determine their response to this situation.(35)

Later in 1986 the Conference adopted the following resolution on "Investigation and Study of Peace Church Concept".

1. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa should declare itself a Peace Church;
2. Conference should specifically state its rejection of violence and war and declare that its members ought not to participate in violence or in military service of any form, although such non-participation should not be an article of faith or a condition of membership;

3. Methodists should not participate in the manufacture, propagation or advertising of ammunitions, weapons or instruments of war, or in scientific, educational or cultural programmes designed to contribute to war, or in propaganda or activities promoting ill-will or hatred among people or nations;
4. Methodists should enter into the study, training and practice of forms of non-violent action as a positive substitute for the violence of war in resisting injustice and bringing about change. Conference instructs the Christian Citizenship Department to prepare and circulate a study document on the issue for the use of Quarterly Meetings and Synods.(36)

It is clear from this resolution that a more rational position of the total rejection of violence and war was envisaged as opposed to the response of the South African churches to the PCR's Special Fund. It was proposed here that members of the Methodist Church "ought not to participate in violence or in military service of any form" (my emphasis).

To facilitate discussions on this subject the Christian Citizen Department (CCD) of the Methodist Church prepared and circulated a study document titled "Should we become a Peace Church?". This was done in preparation for the 1988 Conference where a final decision on this matter was to be taken.

According to James Massey, Convenor of the Working Group, the planned educative process was severely disrupted by interference from outside the Church when the Government controlled South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) broadcast a series of television and radio talks on the Peace Church resolution at Easter time in 1988. In these SABC programmes the resolution, the study document, and the leadership of the Methodist Church were bitterly attacked. Massey notes that

selective interviewing, quotes out of context, smear tactics and innuendos were deliberately used to link the peace debate with proponents of violent revolution. The debate was portrayed as a narrow attack on the (massive) military establishment in South Africa, to undermine conscription and pave the way for a communist takeover. These programmes ruthlessly exploited the fears and prejudices already present in haunted and polarized South African people and in particular the "White" and privileged community. Other right wing agencies such as the self-styled "Gospel Defence League" issued a flood of pamphlets, booklets and leaflets faithfully echoing the SABC-TV line.(37)

This raised sufficient controversy to "kill" the debate and by the time the resolution came to conference, eleven out of twelve synods had rejected the Peace Church concept.(38)

Of interest for this study is that one saw again a strong back-lash from white, more privileged

communities, as in the case of the PCR debate and the Conscientious Objection Resolution. In a strange way they linked the peace Church proposal with support for violence, an attack on the South African military establishment, and thereby promotion of communism.

Thus, in a survey conducted by Massey, it appeared that there was a strong feeling among whites who responded that they needed the army and police, that is, they needed to defend themselves. They also expressed the view that "non-violent disruption will lead to violence" and that the Church was becoming "soft" on communists. On the other hand the few blacks who responded felt that these were non-issues.(39) Massey says that:

it appears that Black Methodists generally perceived the resolution as a non-issue, or an issue which Whites should resolve because it was really about involvement in the South African military. White Methodists generally perceived the military as necessary - in other words that the just war theory is right, is workable and, presumably, that the SADF's present war is justified.(40)

To put it in Cochrane's words in another context, this proposal to be a Peace Church went "beyond the bounds of the permissible for Christians who owe some obedience to ruling authority".(41) Although Phillip Russell ruled out the thesis that the legitimacy question determined the nature of responses to the violence debate, there is an indication here that it does play a role. I shall deal with this linkage in the next chapter.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This brief reflection on the critical themes which emerged from a study of selected events during the period 1968-1988 in the life of the SACC and its member churches shows that their failure to move from statements and resolutions to action is rooted in their limited concepts of mission and change, and that their ideological entrapment, of which they were seemingly not aware, made it difficult for them to reflect critically on the reality with which they were confronted with to enable them to undertake their ministry effectively.

In the following chapter I intend to reflect on these themes critically in an attempt to develop a critical theological theory on the practice of the Church, and in order to propose a mission concept which is comprehensive enough to enable the Churches in South Africa to undertake their ministry effectively.

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13. Ryan, C. Beyers Naude. Pilgrimage of Faith. Ibid., pp.146 and 144.
14. Walshe, P. op.cit., p.143

15. See the 1986 Evaluation Report of Diakonia, Durban. See also Minutes of the White Development Programme, 10th Anniversary Evaluation meeting held on the 17th April 1986, Diakonia, Durban.
16. Walshe, P. Church Versus State in South Africa: The Case of the Christian Institute (London: Hurst, 1983), p.141
17. SPROCAS II Proposal, op.cit., p.9
18. The Kairos Document: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1987), p.1.
19. The only organisation during this time which seemed to appreciate these deeper ideological and economic interests was the Christian Institute (CI). It had at least begun to address these issues seriously.
20. A review of the history and work of the Inter Church Aid (ICA) Programme of the SACC did not show an awareness of these developments. I made this preliminary review in a paper entitled "Gutierrez's Critique of the concept of Development: The case of the South African Council of Churches with specific reference to the Development of the Inter Church Aid

Programme of the SACC". SACC, 1989. The criteria for evaluating projects which were established at the 1973 AACC Ibadan meeting were foundation on basic principles of community development as generally accepted by Third World countries. Whilst this criteria might indicate some awareness of Third World principles of community development, the said principles are not defined in the Ibadan meeting report. The only influence these principles seems to have had is on concepts of "self-reliance" which appear in the Report of the AACC Priorities Committee, presented to the AACC General Committee, October 6-12, 1974.

21. Walshe, P. op.cit., pp. 136-143

22. Ibid., p.139

23. It is clear that the Christian Institute was involved at one level or another with the development of the Black Consciousness movement during the early seventies. Sprocas II in fact moved into the area of empowering blacks to organise themselves and develop strategies of resistance and liberation, psychologically and physically, as the Black Consciousness philosophy suggested. Sprocas II also had a White Community Programme which attempted a similarly strategy for whites but aimed at exposing them to Black realities and

moving then in the direction of support for the struggle to end domination. See Also Kleinschmidt, H. White Liberation: A collection of Essays (Johannesburg: 1972).

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CHAPTER 6

CRITICAL THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last Chapter I reflected on some of the themes which emerged throughout the study of the twenty (20) years of the practice of the SACC in relation to mission in social crisis. I have shown the inherent contradiction particularly on the concepts of "neutrality" and "violence" and concluded that the failure of the SACC and its member churches to move from resolutions and statements of condemnation of apartheid to action to eliminate it is rooted primarily in their restricted concept of mission and that of change. I have also shown that their ideological entrapment made it difficult for them to reflect critically on the reality with which they were confronted.

The exposure of the contradictions and distortions of

reality and the worsening of the organic crisis in the country during the seventies forced the SACC to take sides with the victims of the apartheid system, raising new questions related to the legitimacy of the government and the need for a more critical concept of mission.

This ideological shift of the SACC and its related member churches, (as a collective), necessitated a critique of the theological basis for this practice and the related concept of mission. In this Chapter, I shall set out to review critically this theology and the related concept of mission and then sketch out the foundation for a critical theological theory that will enable a better understanding of the practice of the Church in relation to mission in a crisis situation.

I shall start with a general assessment of the functions of religion and how the conservative function of religion impacted on the practice of the SACC and its related churches. This will be followed by a brief identification of some of the theological and ideological constraints of this period, particularly those related to the legitimacy question. And finally I will make a critical

assessment of the struggle of the SACC to break out of the negative theological traditions of the past and to move towards a liberating theology. The intention throughout is to develop a critical view of mission.

6.2 THE CONSERVATIVE FUNCTION OF RELIGION AND THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF THE SACC

To understand why the SACC and its member churches responded to the challenges of the crises facing South Africa from 1968-1988 in the way they did, one needs to look at the negative function of religion itself and how it relates to change or the transformation of society.

Religion, is analysed by Otto Maduro in its twofold potentiality as the "potential conservative function" and the "potential revolutionary function".(1) This analysis and characterization of religion corresponds with Henri Desroche's two functions of religion, namely the function of "bearing witness" to the traditions of a given society, and, the function of "protesting", that is, of social criticism.(2) For the purpose of this section of our study we shall focus on the conservative potentiality and function of religion. Maduro in this respect says that

a church tends, the greater part of the time, to perform a conservative function, especially in class

societies with a structure of dominance consolidated in a process that has been going on for several generations. This is more likely if this church has itself been present as a church during the process of consolidation of that structure of domination (3).

This function of integration, preservation and stabilization of society is associated with the fact that every society expresses and bears witness to itself in its corresponding religion. Religious tradition in this sense usually acts as a source of approval of the status quo or as a legitimating force.

Fierro describes the problem as follows:

In the past Christian theology had almost always been subservient to a Christianity that was regarded as a "political religion". It helped to provide peoples and nations of the West with an integrative symbolization.(4)

Fierro continues to say that the Church prefers to operate within the "system" rather than be in danger of being limited to the role of "extra-parliamentary opposition", that is, outside the system.(5)

The practice of the Church (SACC) between 1968-1988 demonstrates this tendency of the Church to want to preserve the existing order rather than allow a radical change of the order. This is evidenced by the fact that although the SACC adopted the "Message to the People of

South Africa" it could not see its way to supporting revolutionary movements which were intent on overthrowing the existing order (as demonstrated by the debate on the PCR), nor could they support the call not to defend this order (Conscientious Objection). Whilst the SACC was clearly committed to Sprocas I, which was primarily concerned with a theoretical study programme, the Sprocas II programmes of action began to cause discomfort to many as they increasingly proposed radical changes to the prevailing social order.

Francois Houtart, though, asks why it is that Christianity, "a proclamation of humankind's total liberation, historically finds itself in opposition to the movement which attempt to give concrete expression to this liberation and almost always identifies itself with the forces of oppression".(6) He suggests that the answer lies in the fact that revolutionary movements struggle against all that upholds the social system, and thus threaten the fundamental and central function of religion, that is, of legitimation.(7)

Thus the conservative function of religion has a negative bearing on the mission concept of the Church and distorts its fundamental objective of liberation of humanity from sin and the forces of oppression. In its effort to preserve and consolidate the status quo it negates the very basis of God's mission to transform this world.

The organic crisis in South Africa during the period in question put all this under serious question. In fact the contradictions evident in the debate of the Special Fund of the Programme to Combat Racism, in the Conscientious Objection resolution debate, and in the related debate on violence and legitimacy of government, forced the SACC related churches to move beyond defensive strategies where new theological configurations and categories were required to address the new realities.

This resulted in the SACC explicitly taking sides with the poor and oppressed in the country and engaging in elaborate, and at times risky ministries to the victims of the apartheid system.

This ministry, of course, could still be explained within the old theological categories of compassion for the poor. What was different here, signifying the development of formative strategies and a critical view of this crisis, is the questioning of the legitimacy of government and the consequent need to resist and even remove the incumbent power in ways that went beyond the traditional western parliamentary system.

The 1987 National Conference resolution of the SACC on the legitimacy of the South African regime indicated a consciousness of these implications. This resolution questions the moral obligation of member churches to obey unjust laws issuing from a morally illegitimate regime and then "calls upon member churches to support the structures which are recognised by the people as their authentic legitimate authority in the eyes of God".

It is for this reason, I believe, that Phillip Russell felt that the implications of the call to pray that God should "remove the present rulers in our country are immense".(8) Elsewhere I have said that the consequences of a church statement that the present regime is illegitimate would be far-reaching. The church would then have to take appropriate action in solidarity with others to ensure that the tyrant would be removed from power and a legitimate political authority set up in its place.(9)

The concept of change for the churches in South Africa depended naturally on the legitimacy question. If one starts from the assumption that the

status quo is legitimate then the only form of change allowed would be reformist, that is, one which uses acceptable methods of the status quo within a framework of the ideological mind-set of the dominant forces within the particular status quo. But if one starts from the premise that the status quo is illegitimate, then radical change becomes the way forward. For this reason I now proceed to examine the constraints on the churches in relation to their position on the legitimacy of the apartheid regime.

6.3 **LEGITIMACY: A VITAL DETERMINANT OF THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH IN RELATION TO MISSION IN SOCIAL CRISES**

6.3.1 **Introduction**

Phillip Russell's contention that the question of legitimacy never arose in their responses to the crisis of the period up to 1976 reveals how the Church was influenced by the dominant perceptions of the South African social reality rather than any basic norm of the Gospel. This lack of consciousness about the legitimacy factor led the Church to fail to appreciate the way in which its position in relation to the legitimacy of the apartheid regime determined

its responses to crisis. Even the theology was affected by this predetermined theoretical categorical framework without being conscious of it. To establish how the Church's practice and theology are affected by their view on the legitimacy of government I will now look at the assumptions about this concept. This will be followed by a section on legitimacy and the law, and lastly, legitimacy and violence.

6.3.2 **The Legitimacy of Government: The Great Assumption!**

As I have shown in Chapter Four, the legitimacy of the apartheid regime was never seriously under question until after the mid-nineteen seventies. As Bishop Phillip Russell has stated, the legitimacy of the regime was taken for granted: the question, according to him, never arose. What was under question was only the way in which the regime governed. It is for this reason that while SACC member churches protested vehemently against the regime they never gave serious thought to its removal.

Once one moves beyond opposition to the system (in a reactive form) to an effort to "overcome the whole system in its entirety", it is seen as spilling over into "revolution".(10) The event which challenged and exposed the churches more than anything in this regard was the call to pray for "the end of unjust rule" in 1986. This call caused consternation and resentment amongst member churches of the SACC. Cochrane imaginatively depicts the alarm of the churches by formulating questions which came to the minds of the churches. He says in this regard:

Was this not treasonable. Was this not going beyond the bounds of the permissible for Christians who owe some obedience to ruling authority? Was this not a shocking display of intolerance and unchristian arrogance?.(11)

Cochrane continues to say that this call to prayer did one thing:

it had transgressed what up to then had been publicly acceptable as biblically or theologically legitimate resistance to apartheid....for it implied pro-active engagements on the part of the churches in the struggle for liberation.(12)

To many Christians this was seen as a "rebuttal of the long established theologies of reconciliation that depended upon the church not taking sides in the struggle...".(13)

The Report of the Eloff Commission, in 1983, showed the same attitude in relation to the practice of the SACC at that time. It concluded that "the SACC opted for a revolutionary rather than an evolutionary process of change". The report goes on to say that this included "civil disobedience and non-co-operation with the State", support for disinvestment, support for those who seek to avoid compulsory military service, and sympathy and solidarity with those who are opposed to Government.

The Commission concluded that the policies of the SACC were intended to obstruct the Government's evolutionary process of change.(14) The Commission therefore disapproved of this practice of the SACC, which it saw as revolutionary, and warned that should this "confrontationist stance" of the SACC harden or increase "the State may feel obliged to apply restrictive measures".(15) It is interesting to note that for the Commission, the supposed

revolutionary change which the SACC opted for (according to the Commission) is what it calls "a radical transformation of society". It included the articulation of demands for universal suffrage in a unitary state, a dismantling of all "apartheid" structures, a redistribution of wealth, and a "non-capitalistic economy", which position the Commission says, was articulated by then the General Secretary, Bishop D Tutu.(16)

I have said elsewhere that the problem of the Church's theology of the state in a context such as apartheid South Africa is that it "usually starts with the assumption that the existing authority is a legitimate authority".(17) This assumption, must be seen in its historical contexts from Constantine to the period of colonization and the European missionary expansions. As Leonardo Boff says, in this latter era the Church became "the legitimating religious ideology for the imperial social order".(18)

Thus the Church gave legitimacy to colonial expansionism and the colonial and imperialist powers in turn legitimated the church. It should therefore not surprise us when we observe that even today the Church seldom questions the legitimacy of political authorities. The evils of the system can be condemned in the strongest possible terms but the legitimacy of the existing authority cannot be questioned.(19)

6.3.3 Legitimacy and the Law

I have already noted that the liberal tradition, as David Thomas puts it, strongly holds "respect of the law" of the land as part of its value system. This is in contrast with those who were on the receiving side of British imperialism. He said that in this tradition, one may argue for the repeal of the law but one cannot "challenge the law". According to Thomas, this tradition allows one to work for the reform of the system as long as if one does "nothing against the law" as if this was mere a moral justification of one's actions.

This approach follows the positivistic view of law where law "has an intrinsic worth of its own".(20) " Law has a peculiar quality of creating a moral duty to obey it".(21) Here "anyone who wishes to change this law... is made to feel that they are lawless and disorderly. In other words they are made to feel guilty of sin" and "ungodly".(22) Thus to call an "immoral decree a 'law' goes a long way to ensuring that it be obeyed".(23) This amounts to "legalized injustice". This law here provides its own legitimacy.

The opposition therefore to the PCR Special Fund, the Conscientious Objection Resolution, Disinvestment and Sanctions, and non-cooperation with the regime is based on such "respect" of the law irrespective of whether or not the said law is just.

A reading of Charles Villa-Vicencio's paper on "Theology, Law and State illegitimacy", especially the section on "The Question of Legitimacy", makes it clear that the law is a product of power. This approach reduces the question of legitimacy to the principle of effectiveness; that is, power to control.(24) This understanding of the concepts of law and legitimacy as outlined in Villa-Vicencio's paper kept the SACC churches captives of an unjust "law and order", immobilizing them to the extent that they could never challenge the basis of the laws and the nature of the apartheid state.

The danger, of course, is that "if legitimacy is grounded in no more than efficacy then the rule of law is ultimately the law of the gun".(25)

Wolfram Kistner in a paper delivered at a Human Rights workshop in Gaborone, Botswana organised by the AACC in May 1987, used this very traditional criterion of the

principle of effectiveness of government control to question the legality of the South African government. He argues that:

In spite of these stringent so-called security measures the South African government fails to exercise effective control over its territory. It is not in a position to enforce its legislation on the people. In townships of the Vaal Triangle, for instance, communities do not pay electricity accounts and the rents since September 1984. The rent boycott in Soweto as well as other boycotts in different parts of the country are highly effective. These boycotts have to be understood as strategies of non-co-operation with a government system that is considered to be evil. At the same time alternative community institutions are established at the local and at the regional level. They offer services to the communities and perform what one could call government functions. I am referring to the activities of civic associations, resident associations, street committees and even people's courts. It is true that these efforts at local self-government can lead to abuses and occasionally even to atrocities, particularly as a result of the detention of capable community leaders. On the whole, however, these efforts are remarkable achievements in view of the restrictions imposed on the people through the State of Emergency. They enjoy massive popular support. In case of the eviction of families who have not paid their rent, from their homes the community members in the neighbourhood often help such families to re-occupy their houses.

He then concludes that in terms of the principles of

- i) self-determination which has been applied in Africa in the context of the process of decolonization, and
- ii) effective control over a territory and its people, the South African government is not a legal

government or its legality is highly questionable.(27) In a sense Kistner even suggests that at that time there was a "vacuum of authority" and thus the South African state was a "state without a government" although he recognises that the South African government is a "de facto authority controlling in part the South African state".(28)

Although Kistner's views on the legality of the South African government contributed in the sharpening of arguments of the Kairos Document (September 1985) and the Lusaka statement (May 1987) in questioning the moral legitimacy of the South African government, the question of the legality of the South African government seems not to have been taken further. Hans Brandt, who compiled and edited Outside the Camp: A collection of writings by Wolfram Kistner, raises the question as to whether Kistner's arguments will be supported by experts on international law and says that unless that happened governments were unlikely to act accordingly.(29)

The International Conference held in Harare in 1989 on the Legitimacy of the South African government fell short as well of declaring the South African government illegal.(30)

6.3.4. Legitimacy and Violence

A study of the period 1968-1988 convinces one that the word "violence" is ideologically loaded. As the Kairos Document says

The state and the media have chosen to call violence what the people do in the townships as they struggle for their liberation....But this excludes the structural, institutional and unrepentant violence of the State and especially the oppressive and naked violence of the police and army".(31)

Even when the violence of the security forces is acknowledged as "excessive", says the Kairos Document, it is "called 'misconduct', or even 'atrocities' but never violence".(32) The word "excessive" suggests that this type of violence is permissible as long as if it is not "excessive". It is only when it is "excessive" that it becomes unacceptable.

What then makes the violence of the regime acceptable and that of the people unacceptable? It appears that what makes the violence of the regime or the apartheid security forces acceptable is that it is legitimized, or authorised, violence. One may then

ask, what is required for one to legitimize one's violence? And again it appears that it is the power of making laws which legitimizes one's own violence. This power is the power of the gun.

This takes us back again to Villa-Vicencio's conclusion following his analysis of the court proceedings concerning the legal status of the Smith's Rhodesian Government relating to the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965. The court found here that *de iure* legitimacy is simply a corollary to *de facto* control.(33) This means that legitimacy is restricted to effective control. Villa-Vicencio then concludes, as indicated before, that "if legitimacy is grounded in no more than efficacy then the rule of law is ultimately the law of the gun".(34)

The question of legitimacy, therefore, is a serious determinant of the theology and practice of the Church in relation to mission in social crises. Legitimation however, is an ideologically loaded matter, and one may reasonably argue that those who operate within this framework of grounding legitimacy to the effectiveness of the law are usually

unconscious of the framework. It is for this reason that Phillip Russell ruled out the thesis that the legitimacy question determined the nature of responses to the violence debate during the first part of the seventies.

6.4 THE CLASS LOCATION OF CHURCH LEADERS OF THE SACC AND ITS RELATED IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRAINT

Another factor which impacted negatively on the practice of the SACC related churches in relation to their mission in social crises was the class location of SACC related church leaders particularly during the period between 1968 to the mid seventies.

The first three years of this period falls within the decade which David Thomas calls a period of neo-liberalism.(35) This neo-liberal stage, he says, is a stage beyond the old paternalistic missionary liberation which lasted up to 1961. He characterises the neo-liberal period by the disappearance of the idea of the "assimilability of cultures" and the emphasis on Western civilization as both a "norm and an ideal". Whilst the old missionary liberalism totally rejected nationalism, especially black nationalism, neo-liberals were only "critical of nationalism" but less hostile than the former.(36)

Whilst being critical about black nationalism they were seized with the clash between "English and Afrikaner nationalist values".(37) They detested and viewed Afrikaner rule with contempt. They were steeped within the traditions of the empire with its subtle forms of racism and a feeling of superiority. They were concerned about the overtly racist unjust apartheid laws which negated their cherished liberal Christian values as they understood them.

One can conclude from their responses and handling of the Special Fund of the Programme to Combat Racism that they adhered to the liberal view of South Africa. They judged the South African situation in terms of "liberal political values" which evolved from the experience of the Western tradition of democracy and social organisation. They advocated for political "reform" of the racist aberrations of an apartheid but that had to be "evolutionary" and within the "law". Thus gradualism still characterised their approach.

From 1971 and 1972 the Executive Committee of the SACC and the National Conference became majority

black, respectively, through what Thomas calls "mechanical" indigenization of SACC churches and because of the impact of black consciousness.(38) Although the influence of black leadership began to be felt within the SACC, neo-liberal whites still controlled the SACC firmly until the mid-seventies.

In an interview with Phillip Russell, which I have referred to earlier in this study, Russell expressed the view that the SACC leadership was predominantly white until when Desmond Tutu was appointed as General Secretary. Which implies that even if both the Executive Committee and the National Conference became majority black the leadership of the SACC still remained in white hands until the latter part of the seventies.

The increase in black leadership within the SACC neutralised the liberal factor to allow the SACC to begin to take sides with the oppressed and act accordingly to eliminate the apartheid system. In this regard Thomas says that, "within two years of the establishment of a black majority in the SACC it had been pushed in a much radical direction". He continues to say that:

Constantly in the news the SACC had become a focus of opposition to the ideology of racial separation in South Africa in a way which would have astonished and alarmed the liberal missionaries who originally brought the CCSA into existence.

This new standing, Thomas says, was indicative of the fact that the SACC had finally "thrown of liberal paternalism". David Botha a representative of the coloured NGK (which was an observer member of the SACC at the 1974 National Conference) summed up this position of the SACC, in a succinct way when he reported to his church. He said:

As a result of the blackening of the SACC and the rise of Black Consciousness, the influence of the white liberals is decreasing sharply. These fighters for justice were always a major divisive factor in Church life in South Africa in the past. (40)

The class location of Church Leaders thus influenced the direction to which they led the church. As the Church has, in the main, historically been in alliance with wealth and power because of the association of colonization and imperialism with the missionary enterprise, Church leaders were thus, ideological captives of their own privileged class positions in society.

6.5 A SYNOPSIS OF THE STRUGGLE OF THE SACC TO BREAK OUT
OF THE NEO-LIBERAL TRADITION TO A LIBERATING
THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

6.5.1 A Brief Critique of the Neo-Liberal
Theological Tradition of the SACC

What I have found in this study of the practice of the SACC and related Churches for the period 1968-1988 is a clear ideological and theological movement from the perspectives and thought systems of the dominant classes within the Church and in society to a liberation perspective. Besides the impact of the residual theological elements of the past the SACC related churches operated from an English dominant tradition which was competing with the challenges of Afrikaner Nationalism. As a result the vision of the SACC related churches was in the main limited to a critique of Afrikaner Nationalism and its related product of the apartheid system (at least up to the mid-seventies), rather than the liberation of the black majority in South Africa. To put it crudely, before the challenges of the organic and hegemonic crisis of the seventies, the issue may well be described as how to govern blacks rather than how to let them govern.

Wolfram Kistner, in criticising the theology of the SACC in his 1976 National Conference Report, he said that this theology tended "to become a protective mechanism of established political and perhaps ecclesiastical systems". This theology, he said

is shared by Christians of a privileged group who are anxious to have their privileges protected by the present political system, and by the frustrated section of the underprivileged groups who have despaired of any possibility of change and who regard their present situation as being God given. (41)

The most critical attack on this theology came from Black Theologians from the early seventies up to the eighties. Black Theology, like other liberation theologies, characterized the theology of the white dominated churches as a theology of the racist dominant class. Black theologians saw Christianity as a defence of the white racist regime, a religion of the white oppressors. Thus Mokgethi Motlhabi says that in Africa

.....the missionary drive, in spite of its enlightenment effort through education and their "civilizing" activity, resulted partly in the betrayal of the African people. (42)

In fact Motlhabi points out that Black Theology saw "white theology's interpretation of the gospel" as "mostly self-serving".

Black Theologians saw as part of their agenda the discovery of the original Christian teaching - the message behind the distorting tendencies of "white theology" - and its recasting in accordance with black people's understanding and the demands of their experience.(43)

Speaking at a Black Theology seminar, Bonganjalo Goba expressed his view that participation in the workshop reaffirmed a vision that was born long ago, when some early black Christian leaders such as Rev Dwane and Rev Mokone broke away from the imperial theology that dominated the lives of the black Christians in this country.(44)

One could go through a long list of Black Theologians like Boesak, Maimela, Buthelezi, Tlhagale and many others, with their rigorous critique of what they considered as white theology. What is important though is that those theologians came to a realisation that theology was influenced by the context from which one does it. And that because black and white christians came from different contexts, the contexts of oppressor and the oppressed the theology propagated by white church leaders was bound not to appreciate the black experience in South Africa. They rejected what they called "white theology" and adopted a

theology which takes seriously the pain and suffering of the oppressed and poor in the country.

Although the Black theology debate happened mostly outside or on the periphery of the institutional church it had an enormous impact on the SACC as we have shown in chapter three of this study. The initial reaction of the SACC and its constituent members was ambivalence, and tending towards hostility. Kairos, which was a mouthpiece of the SACC, for instance, saw the emphasis of a black struggle outside a white struggle as polarisation which was not a "mark of the Church." (45) But as the SACC decision making organs became majority black a shift in the attitude towards Black Consciousness and Black theology became evident. By 1975, following Rev John Thorne's presidential address to the National Conference, the SACC resolved to

...accept the reality and importance of Black Consciousness as defined by the President of the SACC and encourage the Churches to promote and support Black awareness in this country. (46)

David Thomas says in this regard that

in the changing reactions of the SACC and its constituent churches to the concept of black consciousness and black theology is to be found the clearest pointer to the end of the long period of white liberal dominance. (47)

The statement of John Rees, the General Secretary of the SACC, at the 1975 National Conference of the SACC, that "....the future of South Africa is now firmly in the hands of the black man" summed up the shift of the SACC.(48)

6.5.2 The Development of a Liberating Theology
within the SACC

Although the mid-seventies marked the point at which the first indications of shackling off the constraints of the white liberal tradition, the struggle to develop a new theological approach to the socio-political and economic crisis in South Africa began with the "Message to the people of South Africa" and through the SPROCAS I and II programmes. As early as 1972 the Division of Justice and Reconciliation claimed that the Church is called to proclaim the "righteousness of God" to the nation, for "it is this righteousness alone which is the ultimate criterion for human laws, justice and social norms" It said that the

biblical concept of justice is rooted in the righteousness of God, that is, the dynamic saving action of God in the world whereby he especially works to redress the inherent instability and disparity of society by his concern for the victims of society.(49)

The report further says that there can be no reconciliation which avoids "the costly way of justice, repentance and forgiveness". And to follow this costly form of reconciliation the Church itself required to be reformed according to this righteousness of God. Thus it says that "justice must be done in the Church, and done specifically and concretely," for "the Church is the prototype of society" (50).

This 1972 statement was followed by theological statements undergirding the 1974 Resolution on Conscientious Objection. The preamble of the resolution, for instance invokes the Exodus story which Robert Mc Afee Brown notes "encapsulates the liberation themes of the Bible".(51), and the classical Lucan text (Lk 4: 16-30) used by theologians of liberation. In an introduction to a discourse on the Lucan text Mc Afee Brown says that

if the story of the exodus is a paradigm for the Old Testament conviction that God takes sides, the story of Jesus' sermon in Nazareth (and what happened because of it) is a paradigm for the New Testament conviction that God brings liberty to the oppressed.(52)

The resolution "acknowledges as the one and only God Him who mightily delivered the people of Israel from their bondage in Egypt and who in Jesus Christ still proclaims that He will "set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18)."

Second, the resolution gives biblical grounds for disobedience by asserting that Christians were not duty-bound to obey demands by the State which do not fulfil the calling to be "God's servant for good" rather than for evil and for oppression (Acts 5: 29; Romans 13:4). Thirdly, the resolution invokes both the Catholic and Reformation traditional theology of the "just war" to negate the violence of the powerful whilst at the same time raising the hypocrisy of those who deny black people the right to resort to violence, on the one hand and justifying the First and Second Afrikaner Wars of Independence and the violence of the imperialism of the English on the other.

Lastly, the resolution called for "radical and peaceful change" and requested the SACC's task force on Violence and Non-Violence" to study methods of non-violent action for change which can be recommended to its member churches".

Thus, the "resolution, in effect, did not only call on the churches to identify with the oppressed but it took the side of the oppressed as opposed to that of the oppressors.

Although this resolution was not vigorously pursued by the SACC for two successive years it weighed heavily on the SACC and later influenced its theology.

The 1976 National Conference of the SACC which discussed the theme of "liberation", expressed its approval of the aims of liberation in Southern Africa and commissioned the Division of Theological Education, and, that of Justice and Reconciliation to work out a statement on

its basic theological concept, its aims and its policies with regard to non-violent processes of change in the South African situation, including perhaps the possibility of civil disobedience.(53)

This action was followed by the 1977 theological statement on the work of the various divisions of the SACC. This statement came at a time when there was need to consolidate the theological positions of the first part of the seventies particularly the questions of violence and non-violent processes of change and the question of civil

disobedience. These themes were raised already around the debate of the Special Fund of the PCR and the Conscientious Objection resolution.

The 1977 statement develops a rationale for the work of the various divisions of the SACC and addresses the primary function of the SACC as that of fostering unity and cooperation amongst member churches. The statement took the question of the preferential option for the disadvantaged and marginalised society further. It calls on the state to fulfill its "obligation" to provide for the "protection of the weaker sections against exploitation" and continues to say that the SACC is "anxious to encourage a form of social responsibility for suffering fellowmen in which their gifts are recognised and developed....to fulfill...a service to the community" as opposed to charity which undermines their dignity.

Another issue which the statement deals with is the question of obedience to circular authorities. It asserts that "the state undermines its authority, by denying the limits of its power". It rejects the "widely accepted tenet that a law or regulation of the state can require a christian to desist from the duty to resist authorities abusing their power". It continues to say that

if such legislation damages society and serves the selfish interests of some in ways against both reason and God's will of love, as revealed in the biblical message, then it is the duty of Christians to be obedient to God.(54)

It is clear from these statements that the SACC at its 1977 Conference still regarded the "authority" as legitimate. For instance, the statement expected the apartheid government to deliver justice for the "fringe groups", and disobedience is limited to unjust laws only, for authorities which abuse power.

At the 1978 National Conference the SACC turned to the question of investments and loans and called on foreign countries and organisations to revise radically their investment policies and employment practices.....in such a way as to benefit to total population of South Africa".(55)

Things seem to have come to the head in 1979 when the SACC National Conference accepted Allan Boesak's proposal that the church initiate and support programmes of civil disobedience on a massive scale. The following resolution was passed in this regard.

This Conference believes that the South African Churches are under an obligation to withdraw, as far as that is possible, from co-operation with the State in all those areas in the ordering of our society where the law violates the justice of God. We call upon all Christian people to examine their lives to seek to identify the ways in which each one reinforces the policy and props up the system. (56)

At the same time a paper on the problem of a "Just Revolution" in response to the WCC study document entitled "South Africa's Hope" on a Just Revolution was being discussed by the SACC. Although the paper went through various stages of discussions and consultations and redrafting it was never finalised by the SACC. (57) But the redrafted document is instructive to locate the position of member churches as all participated within the working group. The working group made a critique of the WCC's concept of "Just Revolution" and then opted rather for a "Justifiable Resistance". (58) This discussion of course was a full cycle from the CCSA's 1952 statement on the Defiance Campaign which called on "all others to abstain on their part from exacerbation of feelings by anything in the nature of organised resistance". (59)

The appointment of Desmond Tutu as General Secretary of the SACC in 1978 tipped the scales within the SACC to put it squarely on the side of the oppressed. This was

followed by the intensification of the campaign of disinvestments and sanctions, and, the acceleration of the process of the delegitimization of the apartheid regime culminating in the Convocation of Churches in 1988.

In his address to the AACC in Nairobi, 1979, Desmond Tutu demonstrated clearly the position of the SACC. He starts by restating that the SACC exists "primarily for the extension of God's Kingdom on earth.....by loving and serving neighbours". He then says that

In the context of the South Africa of today, the SACC's thrust in all of this is liberation - to struggle for the liberation of all God's children in this land, both black and white from all that has made them less than what their Father intended them to be, so that they can enjoy their God given privilege - the glorious liberty of the children of God. (60)

In clarifying this position and also indicating the bias of the SACC Desmond Tutu argued that:

The SACC is not a black organisation. It is not a white organisation. But it is biased in the favour of the oppressed and the disadvantaged. It is the voice of the voiceless. It is involved in the liberation of the blacks because only so can it be involved in the liberation of the whites, because an unjust system dehumanizes not only the oppressed but the oppressor as well. (61)

The events of the latter part of the seventies and of the period of the eighties up to 1988 are in line with what Maduro describes as a case where

- i) the Church has loosened its ties with central power as in the case of the SACC related churches in relation to the Nationalist Government, and,
- ii) all forms of protest against the regime are blocked by central power.

Maduro says that

when all other socially possible forms of protest against economic, political, cultural, or other forms of domination are blocked by central powerthe likelihood increases that the discontent of the subordinate classes may invade the church, and find religious expression in this church.(62)

In a sense, Desmond Tutu's mission statement of the SACC as that of liberation of God's children, opened the way for the subordinated masses to seek refuge within the Church to find religious expression of their struggle for a just order.

This concluded, in a way, the struggle to liberate the SACC to enable it to carry out the liberating mission of God in South Africa.

6. A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MISSION

At the centre of the theology and practice of the Church in South Africa, as outlined thus far, is the particular understanding or conception of the mission of the Church.

The question one should ask is what is God's mission in the world? And what is the mission of the Church in the light of God's mission?

From the analysis of the struggle within the SACC it is quite clear that the problem of the member churches was that of their understanding of the concept of mission, for one's understanding and definition of this concept determines the limits within which one can act. But the understanding of this concept is influenced by the dominant ideological views of society. Thus the limits within which the Church can act are determined, in the main by the dominant ideology of a given society.

Mission as a concept has not escaped ideological distortions throughout the history of the Church. In South Africa, for instance, the concept of mission was appropriated by the dominant white leadership to reflect their own values and to serve their interests. It took a long and protracted struggle, by the oppressed majority within the Church, to reappropriate the liberation motive of the concept of mission.

Mission is not viewed here simply as the missionary act of converting individuals to Christianity but mission is understood as the participation of Christians in God's

Mission (Missio Dei). It is the participation in the "ongoing liberating work of God in history" in our real life situation.(63) This liberation must also be holistic. Gustavo Gutierrez's thought are helpful in this regard. He makes a distinction between three levels of meaning of this single and complex process of liberation, which meanings are "reciprocally interpenetrating". He makes a distinction between political and social liberation; the realization of humanity's full potential to assume conscious responsibility for one's own destiny; and, the liberation from sin and enmity from God and neighbour. All of these, he says, find their "deepest sense" and their "full realization in the saving work of Christ".(64)

Liberation, therefore is understood here as the "intentional goal of the Christian faith" to generate a new humanity and a new society through the power of the Spirit of God.(65)

James Cone's contention is that "Christianity is essentially a religion of liberation". For Cone,

The function of theology is that of analysing the meaning of that liberation for the oppressed so they can know that their struggle for political, social, and economic justice is consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any message that is not related to the liberation of the poor in a society is not Christ's message. Any theology that is indifferent to the theme of liberation is not Christian theology.(66)

The sole reason for the existence of a Christian theology, Cone argues, is

to put into ordered speech the meaning of God's activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed will recognise that its inner thrust for liberation is not only consistent with the gospel but is the gospel of Jesus Christ.(67)

Being involved in mission therefore is being involved in Gods' action of liberation. In a study on "Black Theology - Challenge to Mission", Kritzinger defines mission as an "attempt to embody God's liberating presence in every human situation". He says that

Since God is at work in the world, fostering human freedom and wholeness, Christian mission involves discerning where and how God is at work, and taking part in such activities. The conversion of individuals and their gathering together into Messianic communities find their proper place within this all-encompassing perspective of the mission of God.(68)

In the heart of the Christian gospel therefore is the liberating work of God in Jesus Christ. Mission from this perspective, therefore, is not just an interpretation of what is happening in the world and in the hearts of individuals nor does it consist of condemnation of the conditions thereof. Mission involves liberative action by the Church. Being involved in mission means acting in critical solidarity with those who work for justice and peace in the world.

The question one would ask is whether or not the SACC member churches know about this holistic form of mission, particularly prior to the mid-seventies. I am not able to answer this question within the scope of this study authoritatively.

What one can say is that the SACC was aware of the mission concepts which were developing internationally within the WCC, and internally within the Christian Institute internally. The Council was exposed to and participated in the SPROCAS programmes which critically looked at this concept. Peter Randall in one of his reports on the "Mission of the Church", published in 1972, defines mission, for instance, as follows:

Mission certainly includes personal evangelism, but personal evangelism is not the sum total of mission. Rather we must see mission in terms of the total mission of Christ Himself, who came 'to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let broken victims free' (Luke 14:18). Any concept of the mission which excludes these dimensions is biblically defective.(69)

The SACC was also exposed to the Black Consciousness Movement and Black Theology with its clear concept of mission, but it took half a decade to move the Council. David Thomas refers to a number of significant mission statements made by Black theologians and proponents of

Black consciousness during the first part of the seventies. A regional seminar on Black theology held in 1971 adopted a resolution which expressed an understanding of "Christ's liberation to be a liberation not only from circumstances of internal bondage but also liberation from circumstances of external slavery".(70) Thomas then identifies, what he considered as the most powerful statement, as that of Allan Boesak who said that Black theology believes that

liberation is not merely "part of" the gospel, or "consistent with" the gospel, but is the content and framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ.(71)

6.7 CONCLUSION

With all these voices and witnesses within and around the Council one cannot argue for ignorance or innocence. The only conclusion one can make is that the SACC and its constituent members were captives of their own ideological and social location in society. Their knowledge of the holistic form of mission must have been blunted by ideological consideration and self interests. This conclusion establishes my basic hypotheses that the practice of the SACC and its related Churches was influenced by the dominant perceptions of the reality of South Africa rather than some absolute "norm" of the "Gospel".

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CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

In concluding this study I will review briefly my basic hypotheses and then make a brief summary of conclusions reached out of the critical historical analysis of the practice of the SACC and its constituent members for the period 1968-1988. I would like to emphasize again that there was no attempt to present a detailed historical analysis of this period but I have selected specific paradigmatic events during this period which I regarded as pertinent to establish my thesis.

At the beginning of this study I set out to show that the practice of the SACC and its related Churches were influenced by the dominant perceptions of the reality of South Africa rather than by some absolute "norm" of the "Gospel". This has been demonstrated simply in their handling and response to the PCR's Special Fund, the Conscientious Objection Resolution and the Violence and Non-violence debate. I have also exposed the extent to which

ideology in particular the ideology of the dominant white liberal tradition, pervaded the public practice and witness of the Church using the Marxian sense of negative ideology . I have suggested that this ideological position concealed the real material interests of those who propagated it.

This exposure was made possible by probing certain contradictions which emerged as the economic, political and social crisis deepened in the country after 1976. The organic crisis as we have shown intensified the contradictions to such an extent that they could no longer be concealed. It is important to note here that this illumination of the distortions of reality was situated within the historical process, as praxis, in a struggle to transform the conditions which allowed the distortion of this reality. The Churches were confronted by real life experiences, like the intensification of repression against the black majority in South Africa, the escalation of the war in the Southern Africa region, and the call on the Church to act in solidarity with the victims of the apartheid system. As Phillip Russell and David Thomas have said, the encounter with black church leadership or with the black experience, helped the churches to understand the South African reality in a different way.

I have also shown that the consequences of this kind of exposure compelled the SACC and its related churches to make an option for

the victims of the racist system of political oppression and economic exploitation. They faced squarely the question of the legitimacy of the regime and the need to take sides with justice. This, in effect, was an option for a transformational praxis as against false theory, that is, theory cut from its practical task of transforming the world.

Lastly, I dealt with some of the theological and ideological constraints which affected the practice of the SACC and then made a critical assessment of the struggle of the SACC to break out of what David Thomas characterised as a neo-liberal tradition, held by the white leadership of the sixties and early seventies, to a liberating theological dispensation.

It is clear from this study that ideology, in the Marxian sense of negative ideology, pervaded the public practice of the SACC and its member churches at least up to the mid-seventies. the dominating social practice of the SACC during this time attempted to conceal the contradictions inherent within the Church and in society which could only be resolved by engaging in a transformational praxis. Thus, until the break of the neo-liberal tradition, the practice and theology of the SACC and its member churches tended to reproduce conditions of alienation and domination within the Church and in society. It is clear therefore that the practice of the SACC and its related churches

was influenced, not by some absolute "norm" of the "Gospel", but by the dominant perceptions of the reality of the South African situation.

The development of a liberating praxis during the latter part of the seventies up to 1988 resulted in the articulation of a holistic view of mission which takes on the liberative/redemptive view of God's mission (Missio Dei) in the world.

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